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THE WORKS OF GEORGE MEREDITH

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VOLUME

VII

George Meredith aet. 35.

GEORGE MEREDITH

VITTORIA

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From a drawing by W. Leitch, engraved by T. Higham.

VITTORIA

CHAPTER I

UP MONTE MOTTERONE

From Monte Motterone you survey the Lombard plain. It is a towering dome of green among a hundred pinnacles of grey and rust-red crags. At dawn the summit of the mountain has an eagle eye for the far Venetian boundary and the barrier of the Apennines ; but with sunrise come the mists. The vast brown level is seen narrowing in ; the Ticino and the Sesia waters, nearest, quiver on the air like sleepy lakes ; the plain is engulphed up to the high ridges of the distant Southern mountain range, which lie stretched to a faint cloud-like line, in shape like a solitary monster of old seas crossing the Deluge. Long arms of vapour stretch across the urn-like valleys, and gradually thickening and swelling upward, enwrap the scored bodies of the ashen-faced peaks and the pastures of the green mountain, till the heights become islands over a forgotten earth. Bells of herds down the hidden run of the sweet grasses, and a continuous leaping of its rivulets, give the Motterone a voice of youth and homeliness amid that stern company of Titan-heads, for whom the hawk and the vulture cry. The storm has beaten at them until they have got the aspect of the storm. They take colour from sunlight, and are joyless in colour as in shade. When the lower world is under pushing steam, they wear

the look of the revolted sons of Time, fast chained before scornful heaven in an iron peace. Day at last brings vigorous fire ; arrows of light pierce the mist-wreaths, the dancing draperies, the floors of vapour ; and the mountain of piled pasturages is seen with its foot on the shore of Lago Maggiore. Down an extreme gulf the full sunlight, as if darting on a jewel in the deeps, seizes the blue-green lake with its isles. The villages along the darkly-wooded borders of the lake show white as clustered swans ; here and there a tented boat is visible, shooting from terraces of vines, or hanging on its shadow. Monte Boscero is unveiled ; the semicircle of the Piedmontese and the Swiss peaks, covering Lake Orta, behind, on along the Ticinese and the Grisons, leftward toward and beyond the Lugano hills, stand bare in black and grey and rust-red and purple. You behold a burnished realm of mountain and plain beneath the royal sun of Italy. In the foreground it shines hard as the lines of an irradiated Cellini shield. Farther away, over middle ranges that are soft and clear, it melts, confusing the waters with hot rays, and the forests with darkness, to where, wavering in and out of view like flying wings, and shadowed like wings of archangels with rose and with orange and with violet, silver-white Alps are seen. You might take them for mystical streaming torches on the border-ground between vision and fancy. They lean as in a great flight forward upon Lombardy.

The curtain of an early autumnal morning was everywhere lifted around the Motterone, save for one milky strip of cloud that lay lizard-like across the throat of Monte Boscero facing it, when a party of five footfarers, who had met from different points of ascent some way below, and were climbing the mountain together, stood upon the cropped herbage of the second plateau, and stopped to eye the landscape ; possibly also to get their

breath. They were Italians. Two were fair-haired muscular men, bronzed by the sun and roughly bearded, bearing the stamp of breed of one or other of the hill-cities under the Alps. A third looked a sturdy soldier, square-set and hard of feature, for whom beauties of scenery had few awakening charms. The remaining couple were an old man and a youth, upon whose shoulder the veteran leaned, and with a whimsical turn of head and eye, indicative of some playful cast of mind, poured out his remarks upon the objects in sight, and chuckled to himself, like one who has learnt the necessity to appreciate his own humour if he is disposed to indulge it. He was carelessly wrapped about in long loose woollen stuff, but the youth was dressed like a Milanese cavalier of the first quality, and was evidently one who would have been at home in the fashionable Corso. His face was of the sweetest virile Italian beauty. The head was long, like a hawk's, not too lean, and not sharply ridged from a rapacious beak, but enough to show characteristics of eagerness and promptitude. His eyes were darkest blue, the eyebrows and long disjoining eyelashes being very dark over them, which made their colour precious. The nose was straight and forward from the brows ; a fluent black moustache ran with the curve of the upper lip, and lost its line upon a smooth olive cheek. The upper lip was firmly supported by the under, and the chin stood freely out from a fine neck and throat.

After a space an Austrian war-steamer was discerned puffing out of the harbour of Laveno.

'That will do,' said the old man. 'Carlo, thou son of Paolo, we will stump upward once more. Tell me, hulloa, sir ! are the best peaches doomed to entertain vile, domiciliary, parasitical insects ? I ask you, does nature exhibit motherly regard, or none, for the regions of the picturesque ? None, I say. It is an arbitrary distinction of our

day. To complain of the intrusion of that black-yellow flag and foul smoke-line on the lake underneath us is preposterous, since, as you behold, the heavens make no protestation. Let us up. There is comfort in exercise, even for an ancient creature such as I am. This mountain is my brother, and flatters me not—I am old.'

'Take my arm, dear Agostino,' said the youth.

'Never, my lad, until I need it. On, ahead of me, goat! chamois! and teach me how the thing used to be done in my time. Old legs must be the pupils of young ones;—mark that piece of humility, and listen with respectfulness to an old head by-and-by.'

It was the autumn antecedent to that memorable Spring of the great Italian uprising, when, though for a tragic issue, the people of Italy first felt and acted as a nation, and Charles Albert, called the Sword of Italy, aspired, without comprehension of the passion of patriotism by which it was animated, to lead it quietly into the fold of his Piedmontese kingship.

There is not an easier or a pleasanter height to climb than the Motterone, if, in Italian heat, you can endure the disappointment of seeing the summit, as you ascend, constantly flit away to a farther station. It seems to throw its head back, like a laughing senior when children struggle up for kissings. The party of five had come through the vines from Stresa and from Baveno. The mountain was strange to them, and they had already reckoned twice on having the topmost eminence in view, when reaching it they found themselves on a fresh plateau, traversed by wild water-courses, and browsed by Alpine herds; and again the green dome was distant. They came to the highest chalet, where a hearty wiry young fellow, busily employed in making cheese, invited them to the enjoyment of shade and fresh milk. 'For the sake of these adolescents, who lose much and require much, let it be so,'

said Agostino gravely, and not without some belief that he consented to rest on behalf of his companions. They allowed the young mountaineer to close the door, and sat about his fire like sagacious men. When cooled and refreshed, Agostino gave the signal for departure, and returned thanks for hospitality. Money was not offered and not expected. As they were going forth the mountaineer accompanied them to the step on the threshold, and with a mysterious eagerness in his eyes, addressed Agostino.

'Signore, is it true ?—the king marches ?'

'Who is the king, my friend ?' returned Agostino. 'If he marches out of his dominions, the king confers a blessing on his people perchance.'

'Our king, signore !' The mountaineer waved his finger as from Novara toward Milan.

Agostino seemed to awaken swiftly from his disguise of an absolute gravity. A red light stood in his eyeballs, as if upon a fiery answer. The intemperate fit subsided. Smoothing down his mottled grey beard with quieting hands, he took refuge in his habitual sententious irony.

'My friend, I am not a hare in front of the king, nor am I a ram in the rear of him : I fly him not, neither do I propel him. So, therefore, I cannot predict the movements of the king. Will the wind blow from the north to-morrow, think you ?'

The mountaineer sent a quick gaze up the air, as to descry signs.

'Who knows ?' Agostino continued, though not playing into the smiles of his companions ; 'the wind will blow straight thither where there is a vacuum ; and all that we can state of the king is, that there is a positive vacuum here. It would be difficult to predict the king's movements save by such weighty indications.'

He laid two fingers hard against the rib which shields the heart. It had become apparently necessary for the speaker to relieve a mind surcharged with bile at the mention of the king; for, having done, he rebuked with an amazed frown the indiscretion of Carlo, who had shouted, 'The Carbonaro king!'

'Carlo, my son, I will lean on your arm. On your mouth were better,' Agostino added, under his voice, as they moved on.

'Oh, but,' Carlo remonstrated, 'let us trust somebody. Milan has made me sick of late. I like the look of that fellow.'

'You allow yourself, my Carlo, an immense indulgence in permitting yourself to like the look of anything. Now, listen—Viva Carlo Alberto!'

The old man rang out the loyal salutation spiritedly, and awoke a prompt response from the mountaineer, who sounded his voice wide in the keen upper air.

'There 's the heart of that fellow!' said Agostino. 'He has but one idea—his king! If you confound it, he takes you for an enemy. These free mountain breezes intoxicate you. You would embrace the king himself if you met him here.'

'I swear I would never be guilty of the bad joke of crying a "Viva" to him anywhere upon earth,' Carlo replied. 'I offend you,' he said quickly.

The old man was smiling.

'Agostino Balderini is too notoriously a bad joker to be offended by the comments of the perfectly sensible, boy of mine! My limbs were stiff, and the first three steps from a place of rest reminded me acutely of the king's five years of hospitality. He has saved me from all fatigue so long, that the necessity to exercise these old joints of mine touched me with a grateful sense of his royal bounty. I had from him a chair, a bed, and a table: shelter from sun

and from all silly chatter. Now I want a chair or a bed. I should like to sit at a table ; the sun burns me ; my ears are afflicted. I cry " Viva ! " to him that I may be in harmony with the coming chorus of Italy, which I prophetically hear. That young fellow, in whom you confide so much, speaks for his country. We poor units must not be discordant. No ! Individual opinion, my Carlo, is discord when there is a general delirium. The tide arriving, let us make the best of the tide. My voice is wisdom. We shall have to follow this king ! '

' Shall we ! ' uttered one behind them gruffly. ' When I see this king swallow one ounce of Austrian lead, I shall not be sorry to follow him ! '

' Right, my dear Ugo,' said Agostino, turning round to him ; ' and I will then compose his hymn of praise. He has swallowed enough of Austrian bread. He took an Austrian wife to his bed. Who knows ? he may some day declare a preference for Austrian lead. But we shall have to follow him, or stay at home drivelling.'

Agostino raised his eyes, that were glazed with the great heat of his frame.

' Oh, that, like our Dante, I had lived in the days when souls were damned ! Then would I uplift another shout, believe me ! As things go now, we must allow the traitor to hope for his own future, and we simply shrug. We cannot plant him neck-deep for everlasting in a burning marl, and hear him howling. We have no weapons in these times—none ! Our curses come back to roost. This is one of the serious facts of the century, and controls violent language. What ! are you all gathered about me ? Oracles must be moving, too. There 's no rest even for them, when they have got a mountain to scale.'

A cry, ' He is there ! ' and ' Do you see him ? ' burst from the throats of men surrounding Agostino.

Looking up to the mountain's top, they had perceived the figure of one who stood with folded arms, sufficiently near for the person of an expected friend to be descried. They waved their hats, and Carlo shot ahead. The others trod after him more deliberately, but in glad excitement, speculating on the time which this sixth member of the party, who were engaged to assemble at a certain hour of the morning upon yonder height, had taken to reach the spot from Omegna, or Orta, or Pella, and rejoicing that his health should be so stout in despite of his wasting labours under city smoke.

'Yes, health!' said Agostino. 'Is it health, do you think? It 's the heart of the man! and a heart with a mill-stone about it—a heart to breed a country from! There stands the man who has faith in Italy, though she has been lying like a corpse for centuries. God bless him! He has no other comfort. Viva l'Italia!'

The exclamation went up, and was acknowledged by him on the eminence overhanging them; but at a repetition of it his hand smote the air sideways. They understood the motion, and were silent; while he, until Carlo breathed his name in his hearing, eyed the great scene stedfastly, with the absorbing simple passion of one who has endured long exile, and finds his clustered visions of it confronting the strange, beloved, visible life:—the lake in the arms of giant mountains: the far-spreading hazy plain; the hanging forests; the pointed crags; the gleam of the distant rose-shadowed snows that stretch for ever like an airy host, mystically clad, and baffling the eye as with the motions of a flight toward the underlying purple land.

CHAPTER II

ON THE HEIGHTS

He was a man of middle stature, thin, and even frail, as he stood defined against the sky ; with the complexion of the student, and the student's aspect. The attentive droop of his shoulders and head, the straining of the buttoned coat across his chest,the air as of one who waited and listened, which distinguished his figure, detracted from the promise of other than contemplative energy, until his eyes were fairly seen and felt. That is, until the observer became aware that those soft and large dark meditative eyes had taken hold of him. In them lay no abstracted student's languor, no reflex burning of a solitary lamp ; but a quiet grappling force engaged the penetrating look. Gazing upon them, you were drawn in suddenly among the thousand whirring wheels of a capacious and a vigorous mind, that was both reasoning and prompt, keen of intellect, acting throughout all its machinery, and having all under full command : an orbed mind, supplying its own philosophy, and arriving at the sword-stroke by logical steps,—a mind much less supple than a soldier's ; anything but the mind of a Hamlet. The eyes were dark as the forest's border is dark ; not as night is dark. Under favourable lights their colour was seen to be a deep rich brown, like the chestnut, or more like the hazel-edged sunset brown which lies upon our western rivers in the winter floods, when night begins to shadow them.

The side-view of his face was an expression of classic beauty rarely now to be beheld, either in classic lands or elsewhere. It was severe ; the tender serenity of the full

bow of the eyes relieved it. In profile they showed little of their intellectual quality, but what some might have thought a playful luminousness, and some a quick pulse of feeling. The chin was firm ; on it, and on the upper lip, there was a clipped growth of black hair. The whole visage widened upward from the chin, though not very markedly before it reached the broad-lying brows. The temples were strongly indented by the swelling of the forehead above them : and on both sides of the head there ran a pregnant ridge, such as will sometimes lift men a deplorable half inch above the earth we tread. If this man was a problem to others, he was none to himself ; and when others called him an idealist, he accepted the title, reading himself, notwithstanding, as one who was less flighty than many philosophers and professedly practical teachers of his generation. He saw far, and he grasped ends beyond obstacles : he was nourished by sovereign principles ; he despised material present interests ; and, as I have said, he was less supple than a soldier. If the title of idealist belonged to him, we will not immediately decide that it was opprobrious. The idealized conception of stern truths played about his head certainly for those who knew and who loved it. Such a man, perceiving a devout end to be reached, might prove less scrupulous in his course, possibly, and less remorseful, than revolutionary Generals. His smile was quite unclouded, and came softly as a curve in water. It seemed to flow with, and to pass in and out of, his thoughts,—to be a part of his emotion and his meaning when it shone transiently full. For as he had an orbed mind, so had he an orbed nature. The passions were absolutely in harmony with the intelligence. He had the English manner ; a remarkable simplicity contrasting with the demonstrative outcries and gesticulations of his friends when they joined him on the height. Calling them each by name, he received their

caresses and took their hands ; after which he touched the old man's shoulder.

'Agostino, this has breathed you ? '

'It has ; it has, my dear and best one ! ' Agostino replied. 'But here is a good market-place for air. Down below we have to scramble for it in the mire. The spies are stifling down below. I don't know my own shadow. I begin to think that I am important. Footing up a mountain corrects the notion somewhat. Yonder, I believe, I see the Grisons, where Freedom sits. And there 's the Monte della Disgrazia. Carlo Alberto should be on the top of it, but he is invisible. I do not see that Unfortunate.'

'No,' said Carlo Ammiani, who chimed to his humour more readily than the rest, and affected to inspect the Grisons' peak through a diminutive opera-glass. 'No, he is not there.'

'Perhaps, my son, he is like a squirrel, and is careful to run up t' other side of the stem. For he is on that mountain ; no doubt of it can exist even in the Bœotian mind of one of his subjects ; myself, for example. It will be an effulgent fact when he gains the summit.'

The others meantime had thrown themselves on the grass at the feet of their manifestly acknowledged leader, and looked up for Agostino to explode the last of his train of conceits. He became aware that the moment for serious talk had arrived, and bent his body, groaning loudly, and uttering imprecations against him whom he accused of being the promoter of its excruciating stiffness, until the ground relieved him of its weight. Carlo continued standing, while his eyes examined restlessly the slopes just surmounted by them, and occasionally the deep descent over the green-glowing Orta Lake. It was still early morning. The heat was tempered by a cool breeze that came with scents of thyme. They had no sight of human

creature anywhere, but companionship of Alps and birds of upper air; and though not one of them seasoned the converse with an exclamation of joy and of blessings upon a place of free speech and safety, the thought was in their hunted bosoms, delicious as a woodland rivulet that sings only to the leaves overshadowing it.

They were men who had sworn to set a nation free,—free from the foreigner, to begin with.

(He who tells this tale is not a partisan; he would deal equally toward all. Of strong devotion, of stout nobility, of unswerving faith and self-sacrifice, he must approve; and when these qualities are displayed in a contest of forces, the wisdom of means employed, or of ultimate views entertained, may be questioned and condemned; but the men themselves may not be.)

These men had sworn their oath, knowing the meaning of it, and the nature of the Fury against whom men who stand voluntarily pledged to any great resolve must thenceforward match themselves. Many of the original brotherhood had fallen, on the battle-field, on the glacis, or in the dungeon. All present, save the youthfuller Carlo, had suffered. Imprisonment and exile marked the Chief. Ugo Corte, of Bergamo, had seen his family swept away by the executioner and pecuniary penalties. Thick scars of wounds covered the body and disfigured the face of Giulio Bandinelli. Agostino had crawled but half-a-year previously out of his Piedmontese cell, and Marco Sana, the Brescian, had in such a place tasted of veritable torture. But if the calamity of a great oath was upon them, they had now in their faithful prosecution of it the support which it gives. They were unwearied; they had one object; the mortal anguish they had gone through had left them no sense for regrets. Life had become the field of an endless engagement to them; and as in battle one sees beloved comrades struck down, and casts but a

glance at their prostrate forms, they heard the mention of a name, perchance, and with a word or a sign told what was to be said of a passionate glorious heart at rest, thanks to Austrian or vassal-Sardinian mercy.

So they lay there and discussed their plans.

'From what quarter do you apprehend the surprise?' Ugo Corte glanced up from the maps and papers spread along the grass to question Carlo ironically, while the latter appeared to be keeping rigid watch over the safety of the position. Carlo puffed the smoke of a cigarette rapidly, and Agostino replied for him—

'From the quarter where the best donkeys are to be had.'

It was supposed that Agostino had resumed the habit usually laid aside by him for the discussion of serious matters, and had condescended to father a coarse joke; but his eyes showed no spark of their well-known twinkling solicitation for laughter, and Carlo spoke in answer gravely:

'From Baveno it will be.'

'From Baveno! They might as well think to surprise hawks from Baveno. Keep watch, dear Ammiana; a good start in a race is a kick from the Gods.'

With that, Corte turned to the point of his finger on the map. He conceived it possible that Carlo Ammiani, a Milanese, had reason to anticipate the approach of people by whom he, or they, might not wish to be seen. Had he studied Carlo's face he would have been reassured. The brows of the youth were open, and his eyes eager with expectation, that showed the flying forward of the mind, and nothing of knotted distrust or wary watchfulness. Now and then he would move to the other side of the mountain, and look over upon Orta; or with the opera-glass clasped in one hand beneath an arm, he stopped in his sentinel-march, frowning reflectively at a word put to him, as if

debating within upon all the bearings of it ; but the only answer that came was a sharp assent, given after the manner of one who dealt conscientiously in definite affirmatives ; and again the glass was in requisition. Marco Sana was a fighting soldier, who stated what he knew, listened, and took his orders. Giulio Bandinelli was also little better than the lieutenant in an enterprise. Corte, on the other hand, had the conspirator's head,—a head like a walnut, bulging above the ears,—and the man was of a sallying temper. He lay there putting bit by bit of his plot before the Chief for his approval, with a careful construction, that upon the expression of any doubt of its working smoothly in the streets of Milan, caused him to shout a defensive, ' But Carlo says yes ! '

This uniform character of Ammiani's replies, and the smile of Agostino on hearing them, had begun to strike the attention of the soldierly Marco Sana. He ran his hand across his shorn head, and puffed his burnt red mole-spotted cheeks, with a sidelong stare at the abstracted youth, ' Said yes ! ' he remarked. ' He might say no, for a diversion. He has yeses enough in his pay to earn a Cardinal's hat. " Is Milan preparing to rise ? " " Yes." —" Is she ready for the work ? " " Yes."—" Is the garrison on its guard ? " " Yes."—" Have you seen Barto Rizzo ? " " Yes."—" Have the people got the last batch of arms ? " " Yes."—And " Yes," the secret is well kept ; " Yes," Barto Rizzo is steadily getting them together. We may rely on him : Carlo is his intimate friend : Yes, Yes :—There 's a regiment of them at your service, and you may shuffle them as you will. This is the help we get from Milan : a specimen of what we may expect ! '

Sana had puffed himself hot, and now blew for coolness.

' You are,'—Agostino addressed him,—' philosophically totally wrong, my Marco. Those affirmatives are fat

worms for the catching of fish. They are the real pretty fruit of the Hesperides. Personally, you or I may be irritated by them : but I 'm not sure they don't please us. Were Carlo a woman, of course he should learn to say no ; —as he will now if I ask him, Is she in sight ? I won't do it, you know ; but as a man and a diplomatist, it strikes me that he can't say yes too often.'

' Answer me, Count Ammiani, and do me the favour to attend to these trifles for the space of two minutes,' said Corte. ' Have you seen Barto Rizzo ? Is he acting for Medole ? '

' As mole, as reindeer, and as bloody northern Raven ! ' ejaculated Agostino : ' perhaps to be jackal, by-and-by. But I do not care to abuse our Barto Rizzo, who is a prodigy of nature, and has, luckily for himself, embraced a good cause, for he is certain to be hanged if he is not shot. He has the prophetic owl's face. I have always a fancy of his hooting his own death-scrip. I wrong our Barto :—Medole would be the jackal, if it lay between the two.'

Carlo Ammiani had corrected Corte's manner to him by a complacent readiness to give him distinct replies. He then turned and set off at full speed down the mountain.

' She is sighted at last,' Agostino murmured, and added rapidly some spirited words under his breath to the Chief, whose chin was resting on his doubled hand.

Corte, Marco, and Giulio were full of denunciations against Milan and the Milanese, who had sent a boy to their councils. It was Brescia and Bergamo speaking in their jealousy, but Carlo's behaviour was odd, and called for reproof. He had come as the deputy of Milan to meet the Chief, and he had not spoken a serious word on the great business of the hour, though the plot had been unfolded, the numbers sworn to, and Brescia, and Bergamo, and Cremona, and Venice had spoken upon all

points through their emissaries, the two latter cities being represented by Sana and Corte.

'We 've had enough of this, lad,' said Corte. 'His laundress is following him with a change of linen, I suppose, or it 's a scent-bottle. He 's an admirable representative of the Lombard metropolis!' Corte drawled out the words in prodigious mimicry. 'If Milan has nothing better to send than such a fellow, we 'll finish without her, and shame the beast that she is. She has been always a treacherous beast!'

'Poor Milan!' sighed the Chief; 'she lies under the beak of the vulture, and has twice been devoured; but she has a soul: she proves it. Ammiani, too, will prove his value. I have no doubt of him. As to boys, or even girls, you know my faith is in the young. Through them Italy lives. What power can teach devotion to the old?'

'I thank you, signore,' Agostino gesticulated.

'But, tell me, when did *you* learn it, my friend?'

In answer, Agostino lifted his hand a little boy's height from the earth.

The old man then said: 'I am afraid, my dear Corte, you must accept the fellowship of a girl as well as of a boy upon this occasion. See! our Carlo! You recognize that dancing speck below there?—he has joined himself—the poor lad wishes he could, I dare swear!—to another bigger speck, which is verily a lady: who has joined herself to a donkey—a common habit of the sex, I am told; but I know them not. That lady, signor Ugo, is the signorina Vittoria. You stare? But, I tell you, the game cannot go on without her; and that is why I have permitted you to knock the ball about at your own pleasure for these forty minutes.'

Corte drew his under-lip on his reddish stubble moustache. 'Are we to have women in a conference?' he asked from eye to eye.

'Keep to the number, Ugo; and moreover, she is not a woman, but a noble virgin. I discern a distinction, though you may not. The Vestal's fire burns straight.'

'Who is she?'

'It rejoices me that she should be so little known. All the greater the illumination when her light shines out! The signorina Vittoria is a cantatrice who is about to appear upon the boards.'

'Ah! that completes it.' Corte rose to his feet with an air of desperation. 'We require to be refreshed with quavers and crescendos and trillets! Who ever knew a singer that cared an inch of flesh for her country? Money, flowers, flattery, vivas! but, money! money! and Austrian as good as Italian. I 've seen the accursed wenches bow gratefully for Austrian bouquets:—bow? ay, and more; and when the Austrian came to them red with our blood. I spit upon their polluted cheeks! They get us an ill name wherever they go. These singers have no country. One—I knew her—betrayed Filippo Mastalone, and sang the night of the day he was shot. I heard the white demon myself. I could have taken her long neck till she twisted like a serpent and hissed. May heaven forgive me for not levelling a pistol at her head! If God, my friends, had put the thought into my brain that night!'

A flush had deadened Corte's face to the hue of nightshade.

'You thunder in a clear atmosphere, my Ugo,' returned the old man, as he fell back calmly at full length.

'And who is this signorina Vittoria?' cried Corte.

'A cantatrice who is about to appear upon the boards, as I have already remarked: of La Scala, let me add, if you hold it necessary.'

'And what does she do here?'

'Her object in coming, my friend? Her object in coming is, first, to make her reverence to one who happens to be among us this day; and secondly, but principally, to submit a proposition to him and to us.'

'What 's her age?' Corte sneered.

'According to what calendar would you have it reckoned? Wisdom would say sixty: Father Chronos might divide that by three, and would get scarce a month in addition, hungry as he is for her, and all of us! But Minerva's handmaiden has no age. And now, dear Ugo, you have your opportunity to denounce her as a convicted screecher by night. Do so.'

Corte turned his face to the Chief, and they spoke together for some minutes: after which, having had names of noble devoted women, dead and living, cited to him, in answer to brutal bellowings against that sex, and hearing of the damsel under debate as one who was expected and was welcome, he flung himself upon the ground again, inviting calamity by premature resignation. Giulio Bandinelli stretched his hand for Carlo's glass, and spied the approach of the signorina.

'Dark,' he said.

'A jewel of that complexion,' added Agostino, by way of comment.

'She has scorching eyes.'

'She may do mischief; she may do mischief; let it be only on the right side!'

'She looks fat.'

'She sits doubled up and forward, don't you see, to relieve the poor donkey. You, my Giulio, would call a swan fat if the neck were not always on the stretch.'

'By Bacchus! what a throat she has!'

'And well interjected, Giulio! It runs down like wine, like wine, to the little ebbing and flowing wave! Away with the glass, my boy! You must trust to all that 's

best about you to spy what 's within. She makes me young—young ! '

Agostino waved his hand in the form of a salute to her on the last short ascent. She acknowledged it gracefully ; and talking at intervals to Carlo Ammiani, who footed briskly by her side, she drew by degrees among the eyes fixed on her, some of which were not gentle ; but hers were for the Chief, at whose feet, when dismounted by Ammiani's solicitous aid, she would have knelt, had he not seized her by her elbows, and put his lips to her cheek.

' The signorina Vittoria, gentlemen,' said Agostino.

CHAPTER III

SIGNORINA VITTORIA

The old man had introduced her with much of the pride of a father displaying some noble child of his for the first time to admiring friends.

' She is one of us,' he pursued ; ' a daughter of Italy ! My daughter also ; is it not so ? '

He turned to her as for a confirmation. The signorina pressed his fingers. She was a little intimidated, and for the moment seemed shy and girlish. The shade of her broad straw hat partly concealed her vivid features.

' Now, gentlemen, if you please, the number is complete, and we may proceed to business,' said Agostino, formally : but as he conducted the signorina to place her at the feet of the Chief, she beckoned to her servant, who was holding the animal she had ridden. He came up to her, and presented himself in something of a military posture of attention to her commands. These were that he should take the poor brute to water, and then lead him back to

Baveno, and do duty in waiting upon her mother. The first injunction was received in a decidedly acquiescent manner. On hearing the second, which directed his abandonment of his post of immediate watchfulness over her safety, the man flatly objected with a 'Signorina, no.'

He was a handsome bright-eyed fellow, with a soldier's frame and a smile as broad and beaming as laughter, indicating much of that mixture of acuteness and simplicity which is a characteristic of the South, and means no more than that the extreme vivacity of the blood exceeds at times that of the brain.

A curious frown of half-amused astonishment hung on the signorina's face.

'When I tell you to go, Beppo!'

At once the man threw out his fingers, accompanied by an amazingly voluble delivery of his reasons for this revolt against her authority. Among other things, he spoke of an oath sworn by him to a foreign gentleman, his patron, —for whom, and for whomsoever he loved, he was ready to pour forth his heart's blood,—to the effect that he would never quit her side when she left the roof of her house.

'You see, Beppo,' she remonstrated, 'I am among friends.'

Beppo gave a sweeping bow, but remained firm where he stood. Ammiani cast a sharp hard look at the man.

'Do you hear the signorina's orders?'

'I hear them, signore.'

'Will you obey them?'

She interposed. 'He must not hear quick words. Beppo is only showing his love for his master and for me. But you are wrong in this case, my Beppo. You shall give me your protection when I require it; and now, you are sensible, and must understand that it is not wanted. I tell you to go.'

Beppo read the eyes of his young mistress.

'Signorina,'—he stooped forward mysteriously,—'signorina, that fellow is in Baveno. I saw him this morning.'

'Good, good. And now go, my friend.'

'The signor Agostino,' he remarked loudly, to attract the old man; 'the signor Agostino may think proper to advise you.'

'The signor Agostino will laugh at nothing that you say to-day, Beppo. You will obey me. Go at once,' she repeated, seeing him on tiptoe to gain Agostino's attention.

Beppo knew by her eyes that her ears were locked against him; and, though she spoke softly, there was an imperiousness in her voice not to be disregarded. He showed plainly by the lost rigidity of his attitude that he was beaten and perplexed. Further expostulations being disregarded, he turned his head to look at the poor panting beast under his charge, and went slowly up to him: they walked off together, a crest-fallen pair.

'You have gained the victory, signorina,' said Ugo Corte.

She replied, smiling, 'My poor Beppo! it 's not difficult to get the best of those who love us.'

'Ha!' cried Agostino; 'here is one of their secrets, Carlo. Take heed of it, my boy. We shall have queens when kings are fossils, mark me!'

Ammiani muttered a courtly phrase, whereat Corte yawned in very grim fashion.

The signorina had dropped to the grass, at a short step from the Chief, to whom her face was now seriously given. In Ammiani's sight she looked a dark Madonna, with the sun shining bright gold through the edges of the summer hat, thrown back from her head. The full and steady contemplative eyes had taken their fixed expression, after a vanishing affectionate gaze of an instant cast upon

Agostino. Attentive as they were, light played in them like water. The countenance was vivid in repose. She leaned slightly forward, clasping the wrist of one hand about her knee, and the sole of one little foot showed from under her dress.

Deliberately, but with no attempt at dramatic impressiveness, the Chief began to speak. He touched upon the condition of Italy, and the new life animating her young men and women. 'I have heard many good men jeer,' he said, 'at our taking women to our counsel, accepting their help, and putting a great stake upon their devotion. You have read history, and you know what women can accomplish. They may be trained, equally as we are, to venerate the abstract idea of country, and be a sacrifice to it. Without their aid, and the fire of a fresh life being kindled in their bosoms, no country that has lain like ours in the death-trance can revive. In the death-trance, I say, for Italy does not die!'

'True,' said other voices.

'We have this belief in the eternal life of our country, and the belief is the life itself. But let no strong man among us despise the help of women. I have seen our cause lie desperate, and those who despaired of it were not women. Women kept the flame alive. They worship in the temple of the cause.'

Ammiani's eyes dwelt fervidly upon the signorina. Her look, which was fastened upon the Chief, expressed a mind that listened to strange matter concerning her very little. But when the plans for the rising of the Bergamascs and Brescians, the Venetians, the Bolognese, the Milanese, all the principal Northern cities, were recited, with a practical emphasis thrown upon numbers, upon the readiness of the organized bands, the dispositions of the leaders, and the amount of resistance to be expected at the various points indicated for the outbreak,

her hands disjoined, and she stretched her fingers to the grass, supporting herself so, while her extended chin and animated features told how eagerly her spirit drank at positive springs, and thirsted for assurance of the coming storm.

'It is decided that Milan gives the signal,' said the Chief; and a light, like the reflection of a beacon-fire upon the night, flashed over her.

He was pursuing, when Ugo Corte smote the air with his nervous fingers, crying out passionately, 'Bunglers! are we again to wait for them, and hear that fifteen patriots have stabbed a Croat corporal, and wrestled hotly with a lieutenant of the guard? I say they are bunglers. They never mean the thing. Fifteen! There were just three Milanese among the last lot—the pick of the city; and the rest were made up of Trentini, and our lads from Bergamo and Brescia; and the order from the Council was, "Go and do the business!" which means, "Go and earn your ounce of Austrian lead." They went, and we gave fifteen true men for one poor devil of a curst tight blue-leg. They can play the game on if we give them odds like that. Milan burns bad powder, and goes off like a drugged pistol. It 's a nest of bunglers, and may it be razed! We could do without it, and well! If it were a family failing, should not I too be trusting them? My brother was one of the fifteen who marched out as targets to try the skill of those hell-plumed Tyrolese: and they did it thoroughly—shot him straight here.' Corte struck his chest. 'He gave a jump and a cry. Was it a viva for Milan? They swear that it was, and they can't translate from a living mouth, much more from a dead one; but I know my Niccolo better. I have kissed his lips a thousand times, and I know the poor boy meant, "Scorn and eternal distrust of such peddling conspirators as these!" I can deal with traitors, but

these flash-in-the-pan plotters—these shaking, jelly-bodied patriots!—trust to them again? Rather draw lots for another fifteen to bare their breasts and bandage their eyes, and march out in the grey morning, while the stupid Croat corporal goes on smoking his lumpy pipe! We shall hear that Milan is moving; we shall rise; we shall be hot at it; and the news will come that Milan has merely yawned and turned over to sleep on the other side. Twice she has done this trick, and the garrison there has sent five regiments to finish us—teach us to sleep soundly likewise! I say, let it be Bergamo; or be it Brescia, if you like; or Venice: she is ready. You trust to Milan, and you are fore-doomed. I would swear it with this hand in the flames. *She* give the signal? Shut your eyes, cross your hands flat on your breasts: you are dead men if you move. *She* lead the way? Spin on your heels, and you have followed her!'

Corte had spoken in a thick difficult voice, that seemed to require the aid of his vehement gestures to pour out as it did like a water-pipe in a hurricane of rain. He ceased, red almost to blackness, and knotted his arms, that were big as the cable of a vessel. Not a murmur followed his speech. The word was given to the Chief, and he resumed:—

'You have a personal feeling in this case, Ugo. You have not heard me. I came through Paris. A rocket will soon shoot up from Paris that will be a signal for Christendom. The keen French wit is sick of its compromise-king. All Europe is in convulsions in a few months: to-morrow it may be. The elements are in the hearts of the people, and nothing will contain them. We have sown them to reap them. The sowing asks for persistency; but the reaping demands skill and absolute truthfulness. We have now one of those occasions coming which are the flowers to be plucked by resolute

and worthy hands : they are the tests of our sincerity. This time now rapidly approaching will try us all, and we must be ready for it. If we have believed in it, we stand prepared. If we have conceived our plan of action in purity of heart, we shall be guided to discern the means which may serve us. You will know speedily what it is that has prompted you to move. If passion blindfolds you, if you are foiled by a prejudice, I also shall know. My friend, the nursing of a single antipathy is a presumption that your motive force is personal—whether the thirst for vengeance or some internal union of a hundred indistinct little fits of egoism. I have seen brave and even noble men fail at the ordeal of such an hour : not fail in courage, not fail in the strength of their desire ; that was the misery for them ! They failed because midway they lost the vision to select the right instruments put in our way by heaven. That vision belongs solely to such as have clean and disciplined hearts. The hope in the bosom of a man whose fixed star is Humanity becomes a part of his blood, and is extinguished when his blood flows no more. To conquer him, the principle of life must be conquered. And he, my friend, will use all, because he serves all. I need not touch on Milan.'

The signorina drew in her breath quickly, as if in this abrupt close she had a revelation of the Chief's whole meaning, and was startled by the sudden unveiling of his mastery. Her hands hung loose ; her figure was tremulous. A murmur from Corte jarred within her like a furious discord, but he had not offended by refusing to disclaim his error, and had simply said in a gruff acquiescent way, 'Proceed.' Her sensations of surprise at the singular triumph of the Chief made her look curiously into the faces of the other men ; but the pronouncing of her name engaged her attention.

'Your first night is the night of the fifteenth of next month?'

'It is, signore,' she replied, abashed to find herself speaking with him who had so moved her.

'There is no likelihood of a postponement?'

'I am certain, signore, that I shall be ready.'

'There are no squabbles of any serious kind among the singers?'

A soft dimple played for a moment on her lips. 'I have heard something.'

'Among the women?'

'Yes, and the men.'

'But the men do not concern you?'

'No, signore. Except that the women twist them.'

Agostino chuckled audibly. The Chief resumed :—

'You believe, notwithstanding, that all will go well? The opera will be acted, and you will appear in it?'

'Yes, signore. I know one who has determined on it, and can do it.'

'Good. The opera is *Camilla*?'

She was answering with an affirmative, when Agostino broke in,—

'*Camilla!* And honour to whom honour is due! Let Cæsar claim the writing of the libretto, if it be Cæsar's! It has passed the censorship, signed Agostino Balderini —a disaffected person out of Piedmont, rendered tame and fangless by a rigorous imprisonment. The sources of the tale, O ye grave Signori Tedeschi? The sources are partly to be traced to a neat little French vaudeville, very sparkling—*Camille, or the Husband Asserted*; and again to a certain Chronicle that may be mediæval, may be modern, and is just, as the great Shakespeare would say, "as you like it."'

Agostino recited some mock verses, burlesquing the ordinary libretti, and provoked loud laughter from Carlo

Ammiani, who was familiar enough with the run of their nonsense.

'Camilla is the bride of Camillo. I give to her all the brains, which is a modern idea, quite! He does all the mischief, which is possibly mediæval. They have both an enemy, which is mediæval and modern. None of them know exactly what they are about; so there you have the modern, the mediæval, and the antique, all in one. Finally, my friends, *Camilla* is something for you to digest at leisure. The censorship swallowed it at a gulp. Never was bait so handsomely taken! At present I have the joy of playing my fish. On the night of the fifteenth I land him. Camilla has a mother. Do you see? That mother is reported, is generally conceived, as dead. Do you see further? Camilla's first song treats of a dream she has had of that mother. Our signorina shall not be troubled to favour you with a taste of it, or, by Bacchus and his Indian nymphs, I should speedily behold you jumping like peas in a pan, like trout on a bank! The earth would be hot under you, verily! As I was remarking, or meant to be, Camilla and her husband disagree, having agreed to. 'Tis a plot to deceive Count Orso—aha? You are acquainted with Count Orso! He is Camilla's antenuptial guardian. Now you warm to it! In that condition I leave you. Perhaps my child here will give you a taste of her voice. The poetry does much upon reflection, but it has to ripen within you—a matter of time. Wed this voice to the poetry, and it finds passage 'twixt your ribs, as on the point of a driven blade. Do I cry the sweetness and the coolness of my melons? Not I! Try them.'

The signorina put her hand out for the scroll he was unfolding, and cast her eyes along bars of music, while Agostino called a 'Silenzio tutti!' She sang one verse, and stopped for breath.

Between her dismayed breathings she said to the Chief :

'Believe me, signore, I can be trusted to sing when the time comes.'

'Sing on, my blackbird—my viola!' said Agostino. 'We all trust you. Look at Colonel Corte, and take him for Count Orso. Take me for pretty Camillo. Take Marco for Michiela; Giulio for Leonardo; Carlo for Cupid. Take the Chief for the audience. Take him for a frivolous public. Ah, my Pippo!' (Agostino laughed aside to him). 'Let us lead off with a lighter piece; a trifle-tra-la-la! and then let the frisky piccolo be drowned in deep organ notes, as on some occasions in history the people overrun certain puling characters. But that, I confess, is an illustration altogether out of place, and I'll simply jot it down in my note-book.'

Agostino had talked on to let her gain confidence. When he was silent she sang from memory. It was a song of flourishes : one of those be-flowered arias in which the notes flicker and leap like young flames. Others might have sung it; and though it spoke favourably of her aptitude and musical education, and was of a quality to enrapture easy, merely critical audiences, it won no applause from these men. The effect produced by it was exhibited in the placid tolerance shown by the up-lifting of Ugo Corte's eyebrows, which said, 'Well, here 's a voice, certainly.' His subsequent look added, 'Is this what we have come hither to hear?'

Vittoria saw the look. 'Am I on my trial before you?' she thought; and the thought nerved her throat. She sang in strong and grave contralto tones, at first with shut eyes. The sense of hostility left her, and left her soul free, and she raised them. The song was of Camilla dying. She pardons the treacherous hand, commending

her memory and the strength of her faith to her husband :—

> ' Beloved, I am quickly out of sight :
> I pray that you will love more than my dust.
> Were death defeat, much weeping would be right ;
> 'Tis victory when it leaves surviving trust.
> You will not find me save when you forget
> Earth's feebleness, and come to faith, my friend,
> For all Humanity doth owe a debt
> To all Humanity, until the end.'

Agostino glanced at the Chief to see whether his ear had caught note of his own language.

The melancholy severity of that song of death changed to a song of prophetic triumph. The signorina stood up. Camilla has thrown off the mask, and has sung the name ' Italia ! ' At the recurrence of it the men rose likewise.

> ' Italia, Italia, shall be free ! '

Vittoria gave the inspiration of a dying voice : the conquest of death by an eternal truth seemed to radiate from her. Voice and features were as one expression of a rapture of belief built upon pathetic trustfulness.

> ' Italia, Italia shall be free ! '

She seized the hearts of those hard and serious men as a wind takes the strong oak-trees, and rocks them on their knotted roots, and leaves them with the song of soaring among their branches. Italy shone about her ; the lake, the plains, the peaks, and the shouldering flushed snow-ridges. Carlo Ammiani breathed as one who draws in fire. Grizzled Agostino glittered with suppressed emotion, like a frosted thorn-bush in the sunlight. Ugo Corte had his thick brows down, as a man who is reading iron matter. The Chief alone showed no sign beyond a half

lifting of the hand, and a most luminous fixed observation of the fair young woman, from whom power was an emanation, free of effort. The gaze was sad in its thoughtfulness, such as our feelings translate of the light of evening.

She ceased, and he said, 'You sing on the night of the fifteenth?'

'I do, signore.'

'It is your first appearance?'

She bent her head.

'And you will be prepared on that night to sing this song?'

'Yes, signore.'

'Save in the event of your being forbidden?'

'Unless you shall forbid me, I will sing it, signore.'

'Should they imprison you——?'

'If they shoot me I shall be satisfied to know that I have sung a song that cannot be forgotten.'

The Chief took her hand in a gentle grasp.

'Such as you will help to give our Italy freedom. You hold the sacred flame, and know you hold it in trust.'

'Friends,'—he turned to his companions,—'you have heard what will be the signal for Milan.'

CHAPTER IV

AMMIANI'S INTERCESSION

It was a surprise to all of them, save to Agostino Balderini, who passed his inspecting glance from face to face, marking the effect of the announcement. Corte gazed at her heavily, but not altogether disapprovingly. Giulio Bandinelli and Marco Sana, though evidently astonished,

and to some extent incredulous, listened like the perfectly trusty lieutenants in an enterprise which they were. But Carlo Ammiani stood horror-stricken. The blood had left his handsome young olive-hued face, and his eyes were on the signorina, large with amazement, from which they deepened to piteousness of entreaty.

'Signorina!—you! Can it be true? Do you know? —do you mean it?'

'What, signor Carlo?'

'This;—will you venture to do such a thing?'

'Oh, will I venture? What can you think of me? It is my own request.'

'But, signorina, in mercy, listen and consider.'

Carlo turned impetuously to the Chief. 'The signorina can't know the danger she is running. She will be seized on the boards, and shut up between four walls before a man of us will be ready,—or more than one,' he added softly. 'The house is sure to be packed for a first night; and the Polizia have a suspicion of her. She has been off her guard in the Conservatorio; she has talked of a country called Italy; she has been indiscreet;—pardon, pardon, signorina! but it is true that she has spoken out from her noble heart. And this opera! Are they fools? —they must see through it. It will never,—it can't possibly be reckoned on to appear. I knew that the signorina was heart and soul with us; but who could guess that her object was to sacrifice herself in the front rank,—to lead a forlorn hope! I tell you it 's like a Pagan rite. You are positively slaying a victim. I beg you all to look at the case calmly!'

A burst of laughter checked him; for his seniors by many years could not hear such veteran's counsel from a hurried boy without being shrewdly touched by the humour of it, while one or two threw a particular irony into their tones.

'When we do slay a victim, we will come to you as our augur, my Carlo,' said Agostino.

Corte was less gentle. As a Milanese and a mere youth Ammiani was antipathetic to Corte, who closed his laughter with a windy rattle of his lips, and a 'pish!' of some emphasis.

Carlo was quick to give him a challenging frown.

'What is it?' Corte bent his head back, as if inquiringly.

'It 's I who claim that question by right,' said Carlo.

'You are a boy.'

'I have studied war.'

'In books.'

'With brains, Colonel Corte.'

'War is a matter of blows, my little lad.'

'Let me inform you, signor Colonel, that war is not a game between bulls, to be played with the horns of the head.'

'You are prepared to instruct me?' The fiery Bergamasc lifted his eyebrows.

'Nay, nay!' said Agostino. 'Between us two first'; and he grasped Carlo's arm, saying in an underbreath, 'Your last retort was too long-winded. In these conflicts you must be quick, sharp as a rifle-crack that hits echo on the breast-bone and makes her cry out. I correct a student in the art of war.' Then aloud: 'My opera, young man!—well, it 's my libretto, and you know we writers always say "my opera" when we have put the pegs for the voice; you are certainly aware that we do. How dare you to make calumnious observations upon my opera? Is it not the ripe and admirable fruit of five years of confinement? Are not the lines sharp, the stanzas solid? and the stuff, is it not good? Is not the subject simple, pure from offence to sensitive authority, constitutionally harmless? Reply!'

'It 's transparent to any but asses,' said Carlo.

'But if it has passed the censorship? You are guilty, my boy, of bestowing upon those highly disciplined gentlemen who govern your famous city—what title? I trust a prophetic one, since that it comes from an animal whose custom is to turn its back before it delivers a blow, and is, they remark, fonder of encountering dead lions than live ones. Still, it is you who are indiscreet,—eminently so, I must add, if you *will* look lofty. If my opera has passed the censorship! eh, what have you to say?'

Carlo endured this banter till the end of it came.

'And you—you encourage her!' he cried wrathfully. 'You know what the danger is for her, if they once lay hands on her. They will have her in Verona in four-and-twenty hours; through the gates of the Adige in a couple of days, and at Spielberg, or some other of their infernal dens of groans, within a week. Where is the chance of a rescue then? They torture, too,—they torture! It 's a woman; and insult will be one mode of torturing her. They can use rods——'

The excited Southern youth was about to cover his face, but caught back his hands, clenching them.

'All this,' said Agostino, 'is an evasion, manifestly, of the question concerning my opera, on which you have thought proper to cast a slur. The phrase, "transparent to any but asses," may not be absolutely objectionable, for transparency is, as the critics rightly insist, meritorious in a composition. And, according to the other view, if we desire our clever opponents to see nothing in something, it is notably skilful to let them see through it. You perceive, my Carlo. Transparency, then, deserves favourable comment. So, I do not complain of your phrase, but I had the unfortunate privilege of hearing it uttered. The method of delivery scarcely conveyed a compliment. Will you apologize?'

Carlo burst from him with a vehement question to the Chief : ' Is it decided ? '

' It is, my friend,' was the reply.

' Decided ! She is doomed ! Signorina ! what can you know of this frightful risk ? You are going to the slaughter. You will be seized before the first verse is out of your lips, and once in their clutches, you will never breathe free air again. It 's madness !—ah, forgive me ! —yes, madness ! For you shut your eyes ; you rush into the trap blindfolded. And that is how you serve our Italy ! She sees you an instant, and you are caught away ;—and you who might serve her, if you would, do you think you can move dungeon walls ? '

' Perhaps, if I have been once seen, I shall not be forgotten,' said the signorina smoothly, and then cast her eyes down, as if she felt the burden of a little possible accusation of vanity in this remark. She raised them with fire.

' No ; never ! ' exclaimed Carlo. ' But, now you are ours. And—surely it is not quite decided ? '

He had spoken imploringly to the Chief. ' Not irrevocably ? ' he added.

' Irrevocably ! '

' Then she is lost ! '

' For shame, Carlo Ammiani ' ; said old Agostino, casting his sententious humours aside. ' Do you not hear ? It is decided ! Do you wish to rob her of her courage, and see her tremble ? It 's her scheme and mine : a case where an old head approves a young one. The Chief says Yes ! and you bellow still ! Is it a Milanese trick ? Be silent.'

' Be silent ! ' echoed Carlo. ' Do you remember the beast Marschatska's bet ? ' The allusion was to a black incident concerning a young Italian ballet girl who had been carried off by an Austrian officer, under the

pretext of her complicity in one of the antecedent conspiracies.

'He rendered payment for it,' said Agostino.

'He perished; yes! as we shake dust to the winds; but she!—it 's terrible! You place women in the front ranks—girls! What can defenceless creatures do? Would you let the van-regiment in battle be the one without weapons? It 's slaughter. She 's like a lamb to them. You hold up your jewel to the enemy, and cry, "Come and take it." Think of the insults! think of the rough hands, and foul mouths! She will be seized on the boards——'

'Not if you keep your tongue from wagging,' interposed Ugo Corte, fevered by this unseasonable exhibition of what was to him manifestly a lover's frenzied selfishness. He moved off, indifferent to Carlo's retort. Marco Sana and Giulio Bandinelli were already talking aside with the Chief.

'Signor Carlo, not a hand shall touch me,' said the signorina. 'And I am not a lamb, though it is good of you to think me one. I passed through the streets of Milan in the last rising. I was unharmed. You must have some confidence in me.'

'Signorina, there 's the danger,' rejoined Carlo. 'You trust to your good angels once, twice—the third time they fail you! What are you among a host of armed savages? You would be tossed like weed on the sea. In pity, do not look so scornfully! No, there is no unjust meaning in it; but you despise me for seeing danger. Can nothing persuade you? And, besides,' he addressed the Chief, who alone betrayed no signs of weariness; 'listen, I beg of you. Milan wants no more than a signal. She does not require to be excited. I came charged with several proposals for giving the alarm. Attend, you others! The night of the Fifteenth comes; it is passing

like an ordinary night. At twelve a fire-balloon is seen in the sky. Listen, in the name of saints and devils ! '

But even the Chief was observed to show signs of amusement, and the gravity of the rest forsook them altogether at the display of this profound and original conspiratorial notion.

' Excellent ! excellent ! my Carlo,' said old Agostino, cheerfully. ' You have thought. You must have thought, or whence such a conception ? But, you really mistake. It is *not* the garrison whom we desire to put on their guard. By no means. We are not in the Imperial pay. Probably your balloon is to burst in due time, and, wind permitting, disperse printed papers all over the city ? '

' What if it is ? ' cried Carlo fiercely.

' Exactly. I have divined your idea. You have thought, or, to correct the tense, are thinking, which is more hopeful, though it may chance not to seem so meritorious. But, if yours are the ideas of full-blown jackets, bear in mind that our enemies are coated and breeched. It may be creditable to you that your cunning is not the cunning of the serpent ; to us it would be more valuable if it were. Continue.'

' Oh ! there are a thousand ways.' Carlo controlled himself with a sharp screw of all his muscles. ' I simply wish to save the signorina from an annoyance.'

' Very mildly put,' Agostino murmured assentingly.

' In our Journal,' said Carlo, holding out the palm of one hand to dot the forefinger of the other across it, by way of personal illustration—' in our Journal we might arrange for certain letters to recur at distinct intervals in Roman capitals, which might spell out, " THIS NIGHT AT TWELVE," or " AT ONE." '

' Quite as ingenious, but on the present occasion erring

on the side of intricacy. Aha! you want to increase the sale of your Journal, do you, my boy? The rogue!'

With which, and a light slap over Carlo's shoulder, Agostino left him.

The aspect of his own futile proposals stared the young man in the face too forcibly for him to nurse the spark of resentment which was struck out in the turmoil of his bosom. He veered, as if to follow Agostino, and remained midway, his chest heaving, and his eyelids shut.

'Signor Carlo, I have not thanked you.' He heard Vittoria speak. 'I know that a woman should never attempt to do men's work. The Chief will tell you that we must all serve now, and all do our best. If we fail, and they put me to great indignity, I promise you that I will not live. I would give this up to be done by anyone else who could do it better. It is in my hands, and my friends must encourage me.'

'Ah, signorina!' the young man sighed bitterly. The knowledge that he had already betrayed himself in the presence of others too far, and the sob in his throat labouring to escape, kept him still.

A warning call from Ugo Corte drew their attention. Close by the chalet where the first climbers of the mountain had refreshed themselves, Beppo was seen struggling to secure the arms of a man in a high-crowned green Swiss hat, who was apparently disposed to give the signorina's faithful servant some trouble. After gazing a minute at this singular contention, she cried—

'It 's the same who follows me everywhere!'

'And you will not believe you are suspected,' murmured Carlo in her ear.

'A spy?' Sana queried, showing keen joy at the prospect of scotching such a reptile on the lonely height.

Corte went up to the Chief. They spoke briefly together, making use of notes and tracings on paper. The Chief then said 'Adieu' to the signorina. It was explained to the rest by Corte that he had a meeting to attend near Pella about noon, and must be in Fobello before midnight. Thence his way would be to Genoa.

'So, you are resolved to give another trial to our crowned ex-Carbonaro,' said Agostino.

'Without leaving him an initiative this time!' and the Chief embraced the old man. 'You know me upon that point. I cannot trust him. I do not. But, if we make such a tide in Lombardy that his army must be drawn into it, is such an army to be refused? First, the tide, my friend! See to that.'

'The king is our instrument!' cried Carlo Ammiani, brightening.

'Yes, if we were particularly well skilled in the use of that kind of instrument,' Agostino muttered.

He stood apart while the Chief said a few words to Carlo, which made the blood play vividly across the visage of the youth. Carlo tried humbly to expostulate once or twice. In the end his head was bowed, and he signified a dumb acquiescence.

'Once more, good-bye.' The Chief addressed the signorina in English.

She replied in the same tongue, 'Good-bye,' tremulously; and passion mounting on it, added—'Oh! when shall I see you again?'

'When Rome is purified to be a fit place for such as you.'

In another minute he was hidden on the slope of the mountain lying toward Orta.

CHAPTER V

THE SPY

Beppo had effected a firm capture of his man some way down the slope. But it was a case of check that entirely precluded his own free movements. They hung together intertwisted in the characters of specious pacificator and appealing citizen, both breathless.

'There! you want to hand me up neatly; I know your vanity, my Beppo; and you don't even know my name,' said the prisoner.

'I know your ferret of a face well enough,' said Beppo. 'You dog the signorina. Come up, and don't give trouble.'

'Am I not a sheep? You worry me. Let me go.'

'You 're a wriggling eel.'

'Catch me fast by the tail then, and don't hold me by the middle.'

'You want frightening, my pretty fellow!'

'If that 's true, my Beppo, somebody made a mistake in sending you to do it. Stop a moment. You 're blown. I think you gulp down your minestra too hot; you drink beer.'

'You dog the signorina! I swore to scotch you at last.'

'I left Milan for the purpose—don't you see? Act fairly, my Beppo, and let us go up to the signorina together decently.'

'Ay, ay, my little reptile! You 'll find no Austrians here. Cry out to them to come to you from Laveno. If the Motterone grew just one tree! Saints! one would serve.'

'Why don't you—fool that you are, my Beppo!—pray to the saints earlier? Trees don't grow from heaven.'

'You 'll be going there soon, and you 'll know better about it.'

'Thanks to the Virgin, then, we shall part at some time or other!'

The struggles between them continued sharply during this exchange of intellectual shots; but hearing Ugo Corte's voice, the prisoner's confident audacity forsook him, and he drew a long tight face like the mask of an admonitory exclamation addressed to himself from within.

'Stand up straight!' the soldier's command was uttered.

Even Beppo was amazed to see that the man had lost the power to obey or to speak.

Corte grasped him under the arm-pit. With the force of his huge fist he swung him round and stretched him out at arm's length, all collar and shanks. The man hung like a mole from the twig. Yet, while Beppo poured out the tale of his iniquities, his eyes gave the turn of a twinkle, showing that he could have answered one whom he did not fear. The charge brought against him was, that for the last six months he had been untiringly spying on the signorina.

Corte stamped his loose feet to earth, shook him and told him to walk aloft. The flexible voluble fellow had evidently become miserably disconcerted. He walked in trepidation, speechless, and when interrogated on the height his eyes flew across the angry visages with dismal uncertainty. Agostino perceived that he had undoubtedly not expected to come among them, and forthwith began to excite Giulio and Marco to the worst suspicions, in order to indulge his royal poetic soul with

a study of a timorous wretch pushed to anticipations of extremity.

'The execution of a spy,' he preluded, 'is the signal for the ringing of joy-bells on this earth; not only because he is one of a pestiferous excess, in point of numbers, but that he is no true son of earth. He escaped out of hell's doors on a windy day, and all that we do is to puff out a bad light, and send him back. Look at this fellow in whom conscience is operating so that he appears like a corked volcano! You can see that he takes Austrian money; his skin has got to be the exact colour of Münz. He has the greenish-yellow eyes of those elective, thrice-abhorred vampyres who feed on patriot-blood. He is condemned without trial by his villanous countenance, like an ungrammatical preface to a book. His tongue refuses to confess, but nature is stronger:—observe his knees. Now this is guilt. It is execrable guilt. He is a nasty object. Nature has in her wisdom shortened his stature to indicate that it is left to us to shorten the growth of his offending years. Now, you dangling soul! answer me:—what name hailed you when on earth?'

The man, with no clearly serviceable tongue, articulated, 'Luigi.'

'Luigi! the name Christian and distinctive. The name historic:—Luigi Porco?'

'Luigi Saracco, signore.'

'Saracco: Saracco: very possibly a strip of the posterity of cut-throat Moors. To judge by your face, a Moor undoubtedly: glib, slippery! with a body that slides and a soul that jumps. Taken altogether, more serpent than eagle. I misdoubt that little quick cornering eye of yours. Do you ever remember to have blushed?'

'No, signore,' said Luigi.

'You spy upon the signorina, do you?'

'You have Beppo's word for that,' interposed Marco Sana, growling.

'And you are found spying on the mountain this particular day! Luigi Saracco, you are a fellow of a tremendous composition. A goose walking into a den of foxes is alone to be compared to you,—if ever such goose was! How many of us did you count, now, when you were, say, a quarter of a mile below?'

Marco interposed again: 'He has already seen enough up here to make a rope of florins.'

'The fellow's eye takes likenesses,' said Giulio.

Agostino's question was repeated by Corte, and so sternly that Luigi, beholding kindness upon no other face save Vittoria's, watched her, and muttering 'Six,' blinked his keen black eyes piteously to get her sign of assent to his hesitated naming of that number. Her mouth and the turn of her head were expressive to him, and he cried 'Seven.'

'So; first six, and next seven,' said Corte.

'Six, I meant, without the signorina,' Luigi explained.

'You saw six of us without the signorina! You see we are six here, including the signorina. Where is the seventh?'

Luigi tried to penetrate Vittoria's eyes for a proper response; but she understood the grave necessity for getting the full extent of his observations out of him, and she looked as remorseless as the men. He feigned stupidity and sullenness, rage and cunning, in quick succession.

'*Who* was the seventh?' said Carlo.

'Was it the king?' Luigi asked.

This was by just a little too clever; and its cleverness, being seen, magnified the intended evasion so as to make it appear to them that Luigi knew well the name of the seventh.

Marco thumped a hand on his shoulder, shouting—

'Here; speak out! You saw seven of us. Where has the seventh one gone?'

Luigi's wits made a dash at honesty. 'Down Orta, signore.'

'And down Orta, I think, you will go; deeper down than you may like.'

Corte now requested Vittoria to stand aside. He motioned to her with his hand to stand farther, and still farther off; and finally told Carlo to escort her to Baveno. She now began to think that the man Luigi was in some perceptible danger, nor did Ammiani disperse the idea.

'If he is a spy, and if he has seen the Chief, we shall have to detain him for at least four-and-twenty hours,' he said, 'or do worse.'

'But, signor Carlo,'—Vittoria made appeal to his humanity,—'do they mean, if they decide that he is guilty, to hurt him?'

'Tell me, signorina, what punishment do you imagine a spy deserves?'

'To be called one!'

Carlo smiled at her lofty method of dealing with the animal.

'Then you presume him to have a conscience?'

'I am sure, Signor Carlo, that I could make him loathe to be called a spy.'

They were slowly pacing from the group, and were on the edge of the descent, when the signorina's name was shrieked by Luigi. The man came running to her for protection, Beppo and the rest at his heels. She allowed him to grasp her hand.

'After all, he is *my* spy; he does belong to me,' she said, still speaking on to Carlo. 'I must beg your permission, Colonel Corte and Signor Marco, to try an

experiment. The Signor Carlo will not believe that a spy can be ashamed of his name.—Luigi ! '

' Signorina ! '—he shook his body over her hand with a most plaintive utterance.

' You are my countryman, Luigi ? '

' Yes, signorina.'

' You are an Italian ? '

' Certainly, signorina ! '

' A spy ! '

Vittoria had not always to lift her voice in music for it to sway the hearts of men. She spoke the word very simply in a mellow soft tone. Luigi's blood shot purple. He thrust his fists against his ears.

' See, Signor Carlo,' she said ; ' I was right. Luigi, you will be a spy no more ? '

Carlo Ammiani happened to be rolling a cigarette-paper. She put out her fingers for it, and then reached it to Luigi, who accepted it with singular contortions of his frame, declaring that he would confess everything to her. ' Yes, signorina, it is true ; I am a spy on you. I know the houses you visit. I know you eat too much chocolate for your voice. I know you are the friend of the signora Laura, the widow of Giacomo Piaveni, shot —shot on Annunciation Day. The Virgin bless him ! I know the turning of every street from your house near the Duomo to the signora's. You go nowhere else, except to the maestro's. And it 's something to spy upon *you*. But think of your Beppo who spies upon *me* ! And your little mother, the lady most excellent, is down in Baveno, and she is always near you when you make an expedition. Signorina, I know you would not pay your Beppo for spying upon me. Why does he do it ? I do not sing " Italia, Italia shall be free ! " I have heard you when I was under the maestro's windows ; and once you sang it to the Signor Agostino Balderini.

Indeed, signorina, I am a sort of guardian of your voice. It is not gold of the Tedeschi I get from the signor Antonio-Pericles——'

At the mention of this name, Agostino and Vittoria laughed out.

'You are in the pay of the signor Antonio-Pericles,' said Agostino. 'Without being in our pay, you have done us the service to come up here among us! Bravo! In return for your disinterestedness, we kick you down, either upon Baveno or upon Stresa, or across the lake, if you prefer it.—The man is harmless. He is hired by a particular worshipper of the signorina's voice, who affects to have first discovered it when she was in England, and is a connoisseur, a millionaire, a Greek, a rich scoundrel, with one indubitable passion, for which I praise him. We will let his paid eavesdropper depart, I think. He is harmless.'

Neither Ugo nor Marco was disposed to allow any description of spy to escape unscotched. Vittoria saw that Luigi's looks were against him, and whispered: 'Why do you show such cunning eyes, Luigi?'

He replied: 'Signorina, take me out of their hearing, and I will tell you everything.'

She walked aside. He seemed immediately to be inspired with confidence, and stretched his fingers in the form of a grasshopper, at which sight they cried: 'He knows Barto Rizzo—this rascal!' They plied him with signs and countersigns, and speedily let him go. There ensued a sharp snapping of altercation between Luigi and Beppo. Vittoria had to order Beppo to stand back.

'It is a poor dog, not of a good breed, signorina,' Luigi said, casting a tolerant glance over his shoulder. 'Faithful, but a poor nose. Ah! you gave me this cigarette. Not the Virgin could have touched my

marrow as you did. That 's to be remembered by-and-by. Now, you are going to sing on the night of the fifteenth of September. Change that night. The signor Antonio-Pericles watches you, and he is a friend of the Government, and the Government is snoring for you to think it asleep. The signor Antonio-Pericles pacifies the Tedeschi, but he will know all that you are doing, and how easy it will be, and how simple, for you to let me know what you think he ought to know, and just enough to keep him comfortable! So we work like a machine, signorina. Only, not through that Beppo, for he is vain of his legs, and his looks, and his service, and because he has carried a gun and heard it go off. Yes; I am a spy. But I am honest. I, too, have visited England. One can be honest and a spy. Signorina, I have two arms, but only one heart. If you will be gracious and consider! Say, here are two hands. One hand does this thing, one hand does that thing, and that thing wipes out this thing. It amounts to clear reasoning! Here are two eyes. Were they meant to see nothing but one side! Here is a tongue with a line down the middle almost to the tip of it—which is for service. That Beppo couldn't deal double, if he would; for he is imperfectly designed—a mere dog's pattern! But, only one heart, signorina—mind that. I will never forget the cigarette. I shall smoke it before I leave the mountain, and think—oh!'

Having illustrated the philosophy of his system, Luigi continued: 'I am going to tell you everything. Pray, do not look on Beppo! This is important. The signor Antonio-Pericles sent me to spy on you, because he expects some people to come up the mountain, and you know them; and one is an Austrian officer, and he is an Englishman by birth, and he is coming to meet some English friends who enter Italy from Switzerland

over the Moro, and easily up here on mules or donkeys from Pella. The signor Antonio-Pericles has gold ears for everything that concerns the signorina. "A patriot is she!" he says; and he is jealous of your English friends. He thinks they will distract you from your studies; and perhaps '—Luigi nodded sagaciously before he permitted himself to say—'perhaps he is jealous in another way. I have heard him speak like a sonnet of the signorina's beauty. The signor Antonio-Pericles thinks that you have come here to-day to meet them. When he heard that you were going to leave Milan for Baveno, he was mad, and with two fists up, against all English persons. The Englishman who is an Austrian officer is quartered at Verona, and the signor Antonio-Pericles said that the Englishman should not meet you yet, if he could help it.'

Vittoria stood brooding. 'Who can it be,—who is an Englishman, and an Austrian officer, and knows me?'

'Signorina, I don't know names. Behold, that Beppo is approaching like the snow! What I entreat is, that the signorina will wait a little for the English party, if they come, so that I may have something to tell my patron. To invent upon nothing is most unpleasant, and the signor Antonio can soon perceive whether one swims with corks. Signorina, I can dance on one rope—I am a man. I am not a midge—I cannot dance upon nothing.'

The days of Vittoria's youth had been passed in England. It was not unknown to her that old English friends were on the way to Italy; the recollection of a quiet and a buried time put a veil across her features. She was perplexed by the mention of the Austrian officer by Luigi, as one may be who divines the truth too surely, but will not accept it for its loathsomeness. There were Englishmen in the army of Austria. Could

one of them be this one whom she had cared for when she was a girl? It seemed hatefully cruel to him to believe it. She spoke to Agostino, begging him to remain with her on the height awhile to see whether the signor Antonio-Pericles was right; to see whether Luigi was a truth-teller; to see whether these English persons were really coming. 'Because,' she said, 'if they do come, it will at once dissolve any suspicions you may have of this Luigi. And I always long so much to know if the signor Antonio is correct. I have never yet known him to be wrong.'

'And you want to see these English,' said Agostino. He frowned.

'Only to hear them. They shall not recognize me. I have now another name; and I am changed. My hat is enough to hide me. Let me hear them talk a little. You and the signor Carlo will stay with me, and when they come, if they do come, I will remain no longer than just sufficient to make sure. I would refuse to know any of them before the night of the fifteenth; I want my strength too much. I shall have to hear a misery from them;—I know it; I feel it; it turns my blood. But let me hear their voices! England is half my country, though I am so willing to forget her and give all my life to Italy. Stay with me, dear friend, my best father! humour me, for you know that I am always charming when I am humoured.'

Agostino pressed his finger on a dimple in her cheeks. 'You can afford to make such a confession as that to a greybeard. The day is your own. Bear in mind that you are so situated that it will be prudent for you to have no fresh relations, either with foreigners or others, until your work is done,—in which, my dear child, may God bless you!'

'I pray to him with all my might,' Vittoria said in reply.

After a consultation with Agostino, Ugo Corte and Marco and Giulio bade their adieux to her. The task of keeping Luigi from their clutches was difficult; but Agostino helped her in that also. To assure them, after his fashion, of the harmlessness of Luigi, he seconded him in a contest of wit against Beppo, and the little fellow, now that he had shaken off his fears, displayed a quickness of retort and a liveliness 'unknown to professional spies and impossible to the race,' said Agostino; 'so absolutely is the mind of man blunted by Austrian gold. We know that for a fact. Beppo is no match for him. Beppo is sententious; ponderously illustrative; he can't turn; he is long-winded; he, I am afraid, my Carlo, studies the journals. He has got your journalistic style, wherein words of six syllables form the relief to words of eight, and hardly one dares to stand by itself. They are like huge boulders across a brook. The *meaning*, do you see, would run of itself, but you give us these impedimenting big stones to help us over it, while we profess to understand you by implication. For my part, I own, that to me, your parliamentary, illegitimate academic, modern crocodile phraseology, which is formidable in the jaws, impenetrable on the back, can't circumvent a corner, and is enabled to enter a common understanding solely by having a special highway prepared for it,—in short, the writing in your journals is too much for me. Beppo here is an example that the style is useless for controversy. This Luigi baffles him at every step.'

'Some,' rejoined Carlo, 'say that Beppo has had the virtue to make you his study.'

Agostino threw himself on his back and closed his eyes. 'That, then, is more than you have done, signor Tuquoque. Look on the Bernina yonder, and fancy you behold a rout of phantom Goths; a sleepy rout, new

risen, with the blood of old battles on their shroud-shirts, and a North-east wind blowing them upon our fat land. Or take a turn at the other side toward Orta, and look out for another invasion, by no means so picturesque, but preferable. Tourists! Do you hear them?'

Carlo Ammiani had descried the advanced troop of a procession of gravely-heated climbers—ladies upon donkeys, and pedestrian guards stalking beside them, with courier, and lacqueys, and baskets of provisions, all bearing the stamp of pilgrims from the great Western Island.

CHAPTER VI

THE WARNING

A MOUNTAIN ascended by these children of the forcible Isle, is a mountain to be captured, and colonized, and absolutely occupied for a term; so that Vittoria soon found herself and her small body of adherents observed, and even exclaimed against, as a sort of intruding aborigines, whose presence entirely dispelled the sense of romantic dominion which a mighty eminence should give, and which Britons expect when they have expended a portion of their energies. The exclamations were not complimentary; nevertheless, Vittoria listened with pleased ears, as one listens by a brookside near an old home, hearing a music of memory rather than common words. They talked of heat, of appetite, of chill, of thirst, of the splendour of the prospect, of the anticipations of good hotel accommodation below, of the sadness superinduced by the reflection that in these days people were found everywhere, and poetry was thwarted;

again of heat, again of thirst, of beauty, and of chill. There was the enunciation of matronly advice; there was the outcry of girlish insubordination; there were sighings for English ale, and namings of the visible ranges of peaks, and indicatings of geographical fingers to show where Switzerland and Piedmont met, and Austria held her grasp on Lombardy; and 'to this point we go to-night; yonder to-morrow; farther the next day,' was uttered, soberly or with excitement, as befitted the age of the speaker.

Among these tourists there was one very fair English lady, with long auburn curls of the traditionally English pattern, and the science of Paris displayed in her bonnet and dress; which, if not as graceful as severe admirers of the antique in statuary or of the mediæval in drapery demand, pleads prettily to be thought so, and commonly succeeds in its object, when assisted by an artistic feminine manner. Vittoria heard her answer to the name of Mrs. Sedley. She had once known her as a Miss Adela Pole. Amidst the cluster of assiduous gentlemen surrounding this lady it was difficult for Vittoria's stolen glances to discern her husband; and the moment she did discern him she became as indifferent to him as was his young wife, by every manifestation of her sentiments. Mrs. Sedley informed her lord that it was not expected of him to care, or to pretend to care, for such scenes as the Motterone exhibited; and having dismissed him to the shade of an umbrella near the provision baskets, she took her station within a few steps of Vittoria, and allowed her attendant gentlemen to talk while she remained plunged in a meditative rapture at the prospect. The talk indicated a settled scheme for certain members of the party to reach Milan from the Como road. Mrs. Sedley was asked if she expected her brother to join her here or in Milan.

'Here, if a man's promises mean anything,' she replied languidly.

She was told that some one waved a handkerchief to them from below.

'Is he alone?' she said; and directing an opera-glass upon the slope of the mountain, pursued, as in a dreamy disregard of circumstances:—'That is Captain Gambier. My brother Wilfrid has not kept his appointment. Perhaps he could not get leave from the General; perhaps he is married; he is engaged to an Austrian Countess, I have heard. Captain Gambier did me the favour to go round to a place called Stresa to meet him. He has undertaken the journey for nothing. It is the way with all journeys—though this' (the lady had softly reverted to her rapture)—'this is too exquisite! Nature at least does not deceive.'

Vittoria listened to a bubbling of meaningless chatter, until Captain Gambier had joined Mrs. Sedley; and at him, for she had known him likewise, she could not forbear looking up. He was speaking to Mrs. Sedley, but caught the look, and bent his head for a clearer view of the features under the broad straw hat. Mrs. Sedley commanded him imperiously to say on.

'Have you no letter from Wilfrid? Has the mountain tired *you*? Has Wilfrid failed to send his sister one word? Surely Mr. Pericles will have made known our exact route to him? And his uncle, General Pierson, could—I am certain he *did*—exert his influence to procure him leave for a single week to meet the dearest member of his family.'

Captain Gambier gathered his wits to give serviceable response to the kindled lady, and letting his eyes fall from time to time on the broad straw hat, made answer—

'Lieutenant Pierson, or, in other words, Wilfrid Pole——'

The lady stamped her foot and flushed.

'You know, Augustus, I detest that name.'

'Pardon me a thousandfold. I had forgotten.'

'What has happened to you?'

Captain Gambier accused the heat.

'I found a letter from Wilfrid at the hotel. He is apparently kept on constant service between Milan, and Verona, and Venice. His quarters are at Verona. He informs me that he is to be married in the Spring; that is, if all continues quiet; married in the Spring. He seems to fancy that there may be disturbances; not of a serious kind, of course. He will meet you in Milan. He has never been permitted to remain at Milan longer than a couple of days at a stretch. Pericles has told him that she is in Florence. Pericles has told me that Miss Belloni has removed to Florence.'

'Say it a third time,' the lady indulgently remarked.

'I do not believe that she has gone.'

'I dare say not.'

'She has changed her name, you know.'

'Oh, dear, yes; she has done something fantastic, naturally! For my part, I should have thought her own good enough.'

'Emilia Alessandra Belloni is good enough, certainly,' said Captain Gambier.

The shading straw rim had shaken once during the colloquy. It was now a fixed defence.

'What is her new name?' Mrs. Sedley inquired.

'That I cannot tell. Wilfrid merely mentions that he has not seen her.'

'I,' said Mrs. Sedley, 'when I reach Milan, shall not trust to Mr. Pericles, but shall write to the Conservatorio; for if she is going to be a great cantatrice,—really, it will be agreeable to renew acquaintance with her. Nor will it do any mischief to Wilfrid, now that

he is engaged. Are you very deeply attached to straw hats ? They are sweet in a landscape.'

Mrs. Sedley threw him a challenge from her blue eyes ; but his reply to it was that of an unskilled youth, who reads a lady by the letters of her speech :—' One minute. I will be with you instantly. I want to have a look down on the lake. I suppose this is one of the most splendid views in Italy. Half a minute ! '

Captain Gambier smiled brilliantly ; and the lady, perceiving that polished shield, checked the shot of indignation on her astonished features, and laid it by. But the astonishment lingered there, like the lines of a slackened bow. She beheld her ideal of an English gentleman place himself before these recumbent foreign people, and turn to talk across them, with a pertinacious pursuit of the face under the bent straw hat. Nor was it singular to her that one of them at last should rise and protest against the continuation of the impertinence.

Carlo Ammiani, in fact, had opened matters with a scrupulously-courteous bow.

' Monsieur is perhaps unaware that he obscures the outlook ? '

' Totally, monsieur,' said Captain Gambier, and stood fast.

' Will monsieur do me the favour to take three steps either to the right or to the left ? '

' Pardon, monsieur, but the request is put almost in the form of an order.'

' Simply if it should prove inefficacious in the form of a request.'

' What, may I ask, monsieur, is your immediate object ? '

' To entreat you to behave with civility.'

' I am at a loss, monsieur, to perceive any offence.'

' Permit me to say, it is lamentable you do not know when you insult a lady.'

'I have insulted a lady?' Captain Gambier looked profoundly incredulous. 'Oh! then you will not take exception to my assuming the privilege to apologize to her in person?'

Ammiani arrested him as he was about to pass.

'Stay, monsieur; you determine to be impudent, I perceive; you shall not be obtrusive.'

Vittoria had tremblingly taken old Agostino's hand, and had risen to her feet. Still keeping her face hidden, she walked down the slope, followed at an interval by her servant, and curiously watched by the English officer, who said to himself, 'Well, I suppose I was mistaken,' and consequently discovered that he was in a hobble.

A short duologue in their best stilted French ensued between him and Ammiani. It was pitched too high in a foreign tongue for Captain Gambier to descend from it, as he would fain have done, to ask the lady's name. They exchanged cards and formal salutes, and parted.

The dignified altercation had been witnessed by the main body of the tourists. Captain Gambier told them that he had merely interchanged amicable commonplaces with the Frenchman,—'or Italian,' he added carelessly, reading the card in his hand. 'I thought she might be somebody whom we knew,' he said to Mrs. Sedley.

'Not the shadow of a likeness to her,' the lady returned.

She had another opinion when later a scrap of paper bearing one pencilled line on it was handed round. A damsel of the party had picked it up near the spot where, as she remarked, 'the foreigners had been sitting.' It said:—

'*Let none who look for safety go to Milan.*'

CHAPTER VII

BARTO RIZZO

A WEEK following the day of meetings on the Motterone, Luigi the spy was in Milan, making his way across the Piazza de' Mercanti. He entered a narrow court, one of those which were anciently built upon the Oriental principle of giving shade at the small cost of excluding common air. It was dusky noon there through the hours of light, and thrice night when darkness fell. The atmosphere, during the sun's short passage overhead, hung with a glittering heaviness, like the twinkling iron-dust in a subterranean smithy. On the lower window of one of the houses there was a board, telling men that Barto Rizzo made and mended shoes, and requesting people who wished to see him to make much noise at the door, for he was hard of hearing. It speedily became known in the court that a visitor desired to see Barto Rizzo. The noise produced by Luigi was like that of a fanatical beater of the tom-tom ; he knocked and banged and danced against the door, crying out for his passing amusement an adaptation of a popular ballad :—

'Oh, Barto, Barto ! my boot is sadly worn : The toe is seen that should be veiled from sight. The toe that should be veiled like an Eastern maid : like a sultan's daughter : Shocking ! shocking ! One of a company of ten that were living a secluded life in chaste privacy ! Oh, Barto, Barto ! must I charge it to thy despicable leather or to my incessant pilgrimages ? One fair toe ! I fear presently the corruption of the remaining nine : Then, alas ! what do I go on ? How shall I come to a

perfumed end, who walk on ten indecent toes ? Well may the delicate gentlemen sneer at me and scorn me : As for the angelic Lady who deigns to look so low, I may say of her that her graciousness clothes what she looks at : To her the foot, the leg, the back : To her the very soul is bared : But she is a rarity upon earth. Oh, Barto, Barto, she is rarest in Milan ! I might run a day's length and not find her. If, O Barto, as my boot hints to me, I am about to be stripped of my last covering, I must hurry to the inconvenient little chamber of my mother, who cannot refuse to acknowledge me as of this pattern : Barto, O shoemaker ! thou son of artifice and right-hand-man of necessity, preserve me in the fashion of the time : Cobble me neatly : A dozen wax threads and I am remade :—Excellent ! I thank you ! Now I can plant my foot bravely : Oh, Barto, my shoemaker ! between ourselves, it is unpleasant in these refined days to be likened at all to that preposterous Adam ! '

The omission of the apostrophes to Barto left it one of the ironical, veiled Republican, semi-socialistic ballads of the time, which were sung about the streets for the sharpness and pith of the couplets, and not from a perception of the double edge down the length of them.

As Luigi was coming to the terminating line, the door opened. A very handsome sullen young woman, of the dark, thick-browed Lombard type, asked what was wanted ; at the same time the deep voice of a man, conjecturally rising from a lower floor, called, and a lock was rattled. The woman told Luigi to enter. He sent a glance behind him ; he had evidently been drained of his sprightliness in a second ; he moved in with the slackness of limb of a gibbeted figure. The door shut ; the woman led him downstairs. He could not have danced or sung a song now for great pay. The smell of

mouldiness became so depressing to him that the smell of leather struck his nostrils refreshingly. He thought: 'Oh, Virgin! it 's dark enough to make one believe in every single thing they tell us about the saints.' Up in the light of day Luigi had a turn for careless thinking on these holy subjects.

Barto Rizzo stood before him in a square of cellarage that was furnished with implements of his craft, too dark for a clear discernment of features.

'So, here you are!' was the greeting Luigi received.

It was a tremendous voice, that seemed to issue from a vast cavity. 'Lead the gentleman to my sitting-room,' said Barto. Luigi felt the wind of a handkerchief, and guessed that his eyes were about to be bandaged by the woman behind him. He petitioned to be spared it, on the plea, firstly, that it expressed want of confidence; secondly, that it took him in the stomach. The handkerchief was tight across his eyes while he was speaking. His hand was touched by the woman, and he commenced timidly an ascent of stairs. It continued so that he would have sworn he was a shorter time going up the Motterone; then down, and along a passage; lower down, deep into corpse-climate; up again, up another enormous mountain; and once more down, as among rats and beetles, and down, as among faceless horrors, and down, where all things seemed prostrate and with a taste of brass. It was the poor fellow's nervous imagination, preternaturally excited. When the handkerchief was caught away, his jaw was shuddering, his eyes were sickly; he looked as if impaled on the prongs of fright. It required just half a minute to reanimate this mercurial creature, when he found himself under the light of two lamps, and Barto Rizzo fronting him, in a place so like the square of cellarage which he had been led to with unbandaged eyes, that it relieved his dread by touching

his humour. He cried, 'Have I made the journey of the signor Capofinale, who visited the other end of the world by standing on his head?'

Barto Rizzo rolled out a burly laugh.

'Sit,' he said. 'You 're a poor sweating body, and must needs have a dry tongue. Will you drink?'

'Dry!' quoth Luigi. 'Holy San Carlo is a mash in a wine-press compared with me.'

Barto Rizzo handed him a liquor, which he drank, and after gave thanks to Providence. Barto raised his hand.

'We 're too low down here for that kind of machinery,' he said. 'They say that Providence is on the side of the Austrians. Now then, what have you to communicate to me? This time I let you come to my house: trust at all, trust entirely. I think that 's the proverb. You are admitted: speak like a guest.'

Luigi's preference happened to be for categorical interrogations. Never having an idea of spontaneously telling the whole truth, the sense that he was undertaking a narrative gave him such emotions as a bad swimmer upon deep seas may have; while, on the other hand, his being subjected to a series of questions seemed at least to leave him with one leg on shore, for then he could lie discreetly, and according to the finger-posts, and only when necessary, and he could recover himself if he made a false step. His ingenious mind reasoned these images out to his own satisfaction. He requested, therefore, that his host would let him hear what he desired to know.

Barto Rizzo's forefinger was pressed from an angle into one temple. His head inclined to meet it: so that it was like the support to a broad blunt pillar. The cropped head was flat as an owl's; the chest of immense breadth; the bulgy knees and big hands were those of a dwarf-

athlete. Strong colour, lying full on him from the neck to the forehead, made the big veins purple and the eyes fierier than the movements of his mind would have indicated. He was simply studying the character of his man. Luigi feared him ; he was troubled chiefly because he was unaware of what Barto Rizzo wanted to know, and could not consequently tell what to bring to the market. The simplicity of the questions put to him were bewildering : he fell into the trap. Barto's eyes began to get terribly oblique. Jingling money in his pocket, he said—

'You saw Colonel Corte on the Motterone : you saw the Signor Agostino Balderini : good men, both ! Also young Count Ammiani : I served his father, the General, and jogged the lad on my knee. You saw the Signorina Vittoria. The English people came, and you heard them talk, but did not understand. You came home and told all this to the Signor Antonio, your employer number one. You have told the same to me, your employer number two. There 's your pay.'

Barto summed up thus the information he had received, and handed Luigi six gold pieces. The latter, springing with boyish thankfulness and pride at the easy earning of them, threw in a few additional facts, as, that he had been taken for a spy by the conspirators, and had heard one of the Englishmen mention the Signorina Vittoria's English name. Barto Rizzo lifted his eyebrows queerly. 'We 'll go through another interrogatory in an hour,' he said ; 'stop here till I return.'

Luigi was always too full of his own cunning to suspect the same in another, until he was left alone to reflect on a scene ; when it became overwhelmingly transparent. 'But, what could I say more than I did say ? ' he asked himself, as he stared at the one lamp Barto had left. Finding the door unfastened, he took the lamp and lighted himself out, and along a cavernous passage ending in a

blank wall, against which his heart knocked and fell, for his sensation was immediately the terror of imprisonment and helplessness. Mad with alarm, he tried every spot for an aperture. Then he sat down on his haunches ; he remembered hearing word of Barto Rizzo's rack :—certain methods peculiar to Barto Rizzo, by which he screwed matters out of his agents, and terrified them into fidelity. His personal dealings with Barto were of recent date ; but Luigi knew him by repute : he knew that the shoemaking business was a mask. Barto had been a soldier, a schoolmaster : twice an exile ; a conspirator since the day when the Austrians had the two fine Apples of Pomona, Lombardy and Venice, given them as fruits of peace. Luigi remembered how he had snapped his fingers at the name of Barto Rizzo. There was no despising him now. He could only arrive at a peaceful contemplation of Barto Rizzo's character by determining to tell all, and (since that seemed little) more than he knew. He got back to the leather-smelling chamber, which was either the same or purposely rendered exactly similar to the one he had first been led to.

At the end of a leaden hour Barto Rizzo returned.

'Now, to recommence,' he said. 'Drink before you speak, if your tongue is dry.'

Luigi thrust aside the mention of liquor. It seemed to him that by doing so he propitiated that ill-conceived divinity called Virtue, who lived in the open air, and desired men to drink water. Barto Rizzo evidently understood the kind of man he was schooling to his service.

'Did that Austrian officer, who is an Englishman, acquainted with the signor Antonio-Pericles, meet the lady, his sister, on the Motterone ? '

Luigi answered promptly, 'Yes.'

'Did the signorina Vittoria speak to the lady ? '

'No.'

'Not a word ?'

'No.'

'Not one communication to her ?'

'No : she sat under her straw hat.'

'She concealed her face ?'

'She sat like a naughty angry girl.'

'Did she speak to the officer ?'

'Not she !'

'Did she see him ?'

'Of course she did ! As if a woman's eyes couldn't see through straw-plait !'

Barto paused, calculatingly, eye on victim.

'The signorina Vittoria,' he resumed, 'has engaged to sing on the night of the Fifteenth ; has she ?'

A twitching of Luigi's muscles showed that he apprehended a necessary straining of his invention on another tack.

'On the night of the Fifteenth, signor Barto Rizzo ? That 's the night of her first appearance. Oh, yes !'

'To sing a particular song ?'

'Lots of them ! ay-aïe !'

Barto took him by the shoulder and pressed him into his seat till he howled, saying, 'Now, there 's a slate and a pencil. Expect me at the end of two hours, this time. Next time it will be four : then eight, then sixteen. Find out how many hours that will be at the sixteenth examination.'

Luigi flew at the torturer and stuck at the length of his straightened arm, where he wriggled, refusing to listen to the explanation of Barto's system ; which was that, in cases where every fresh examination taught him more, they were continued, after regularly-lengthening intervals, that might extend from the sowing of seed to the ripening of grain. 'When all 's delivered,' said Barto, 'then we

begin to correct discrepancies. I expect,' he added, 'you and I will have done before a week 's out.'

'A week!' Luigi shouted. 'Here 's my stomach already leaping like a fish at the smell of this hole. You brute bear! it 's a smell of bones. It turns my inside with a spoon. May the devil seize you when you 're sleeping! You shan't go: I 'll tell you everything—everything. I can't tell you anything more than I have told you. She gave me a cigarette—there! Now you know:—gave me a cigarette; a cigarette. I smoked it—there! Your faithful servant!'

'She gave you a cigarette, and you smoked it; ha!' said Barto Rizzo, who appeared to see something to weigh even in that small fact. 'The English lady gave you the cigarette?'

Luigi nodded: 'Yes'; pertinacious in deception. 'Yes,' he repeated; 'the English lady. That was the person. What 's the use of your skewering me with your eyes!'

'I perceive that you have never travelled, my Luigi,' said Barto. 'I am afraid we shall not part so early as I had supposed. I double the dose, and return to you in four hours' time.'

Luigi threw himself flat on the ground, shrieking that he was ready to tell everything—anything. Not even the apparent desperation of his circumstances could teach him that a promise to tell the truth was a more direct way of speaking. Indeed, the hitting of the truth would have seemed to him a sort of artful archery, the burden of which should devolve upon the questioner, whom he supplied with the relation of 'everything and anything.'

All through a night Luigi's lesson continued. In the morning he was still breaking out in small and purposeless lies; but Barto Rizzo had accomplished his two objects: that of squeezing him, and that of subjecting

his imagination. Luigi confessed (owing to a singular recovery of his memory) the gift of the cigarette as coming from the signorina Vittoria. What did it matter if she did give him a cigarette ?

'You adore her for it ?' said Barto.

'May the Virgin sweep the floor of heaven into her lap !' interjected Luigi. 'She is a good patriot.'

'Are you one ?' Barto asked.

'Certainly I am.'

'Then I shall have to suspect you, for the good of your country.'

Luigi could not see the deduction. He was incapable of guessing that it might apply forcibly to Vittoria, who had undertaken a grave, perilous, and imminent work. Nothing but the spontaneous desire to elude the pursuit of a questioner had at first instigated his baffling of Barto Rizzo, until, fearing the dark square man himself, he feared him dimly for Vittoria's sake ; he could not have said why. She was a good patriot : wherefore the reason for wishing to know more of her ? Barto Rizzo had compelled him at last to furnish a narrative of the events of that day on the Motterone, and, finding himself at sea, Luigi struck out boldly and swam as well as he could. Barto disentangled one succinct thread of incidents : Vittoria had been commissioned by the Chief to sing on the night of the Fifteenth ; she had subsequently, without speaking to any of the English party, or revealing her features—'keeping them beautifully hidden,' Luigi said, with unaccountable enthusiasm—written a warning to them that they were to avoid Milan. The paper on which the warning had been written was found by the English when he was the only Italian on the height, lying there to observe and note things in the service of Barto Rizzo. The writing was English, but when one of the English ladies—'who wore her hair like a planed shred of wood ;

like a torn vine ; like a kite with two tails ; like Luxury at the Banquet, ready to tumble over marble shoulders ' (an illustration drawn probably from Luigi's study of some allegorical picture,—he was at a loss to describe the foreign female head-dress)—when this lady had read the writing, she exclaimed that it was the hand of ' her Emilia ! ' and soon after she addressed Luigi in English, then in French, then in ' barricade Italian ' (by which phrase Luigi meant that the Italian words were there, but did not present their proper smooth footing for his understanding), and strove to obtain information from him concerning the signorina, and also concerning the chances that Milan would be an agitated city. Luigi assured her that Milan was the peacefullest of cities—a pure babe. He admitted his acquaintance with the signorina Vittoria Campa, and denied her being ' any longer ' the Emilia Alessandra Belloni of the English lady. The latter had partly retained him in her service, having given him directions to call at her hotel in Milan, and help her to communicate with her old friend. ' I present myself to her to-morrow, Friday,' said Luigi.

' That 's to-day,' said Barto.

Luigi clapped his hand to his cheek, crying wofully, ' You 've drawn, beastly gaoler ! a night out of my life like an old jaw-tooth.'

' There 's day two or three fathoms above us,' said Barto ; ' and hot coffee is coming down.'

' I believe I 've been stewing in a pot while the moon looked so cool.' Luigi groaned, and touched up along the sleeves of his arms : that which he fancied he instantaneously felt.

The coffee was brought by the heavy-browed young woman. Before she quitted the place Barto desired her to cast her eyes on Luigi, and say whether she thought she should know him again. She scarcely glanced, and gave

answer with a shrug of the shoulders as she retired. Luigi at the time was drinking. He rose; he was about to speak, but yawned instead. The woman's carelessly-dropped upper eyelids seemed to him to be reading him through a dozen of his contortions and disguises, and checked the idea of liberty which he associated with getting to the daylight.

'But it *is* worth the money!' shouted Barto Rizzo, with a splendid divination of his thought. 'You skulker! are you not paid and fattened to do business which you 've only to remember, and it 'll honey your legs in purgatory? You 're the shooting-dog of that Greek, and you nose about the bushes for his birds, and who cares if any fellow, just for exercise, shoots a dagger a yard from his wrist and sticks you in the back? You serve me, and there 's pay for you; brothers, doctors, nurses, friends,—a tight blanket if you fall from a housetop! and masses for your soul when your hour strikes. The treacherous cur lies rotting in a ditch! Do you conceive that when I employ you I am in your power? Your intelligence will open gradually. Do you know that here in this house I can conceal fifty men, and leave the door open to the Croats to find them? I tell you now—you are free; go forth. You go alone; no one touches you; ten years hence a skeleton is found with an English letter on its ribs——'

'O, stop! signor Barto, and be a blessed man,' interposed Luigi, doubling and wriggling in a posture that appeared as if he were shaking negatives from the elbows of his crossed arms. 'Stop. How did you know of a letter? I forgot—I *have* seen the English lady at her hotel. I was carrying the signorina's answer, when I thought "Barto Rizzo calls me," and I came like a lamb. And what does it matter? She is a good patriot; you are a good patriot; here it is. Consider my reputation, do; and be careful with the wax.'

Barto drew a long breath. The mention of the English letter had been a shot in the dark. The result corroborated his devotional belief in the unerringness of his own powerful intuition. He had guessed the case, or hardly even guessed it—merely stated it, to horrify Luigi. The letter was placed in his hands, and he sat as strongly thrilled by emotion, under the mask of his hard face, as a lover hearing music. 'I read English,' he remarked.

After he had drawn the seal three or four times slowly over the lamp, the green wax bubbled and unsnapped. Vittoria had written the following lines in reply to her old English friend :—

'Forgive me, and do not ask to see me until we have passed the fifteenth of the month. You will see me that night at La Scala. I wish to embrace you, but I am miserable to think of your being in Milan. I cannot yet tell you where my residence is. I have not met your brother. If he writes to me it will make me happy, but I refuse to see him. I will explain to him why. Let him not try to see me. Let him send by this messenger. I hope he will contrive to be out of Milan all this month. Pray let me influence you to go for a time. I write coldly ; I am tired, and forget my English. I do not forget my friends. I have you close against my heart. If it were prudent, and it involved me alone, I would come to you without a moment's loss of time. Do know that I am not changed, and am your affectionate

'Emilia.'

When Barto Rizzo had finished reading, he went from the chamber and blew his voice into what Luigi supposed to be a hollow tube.

'This letter,' he said, coming back, 'is a repetition of the signorina Vittoria's warning to her friends on the

Motterone. The English lady's brother who is in the Austrian service, was there, you say ? '

Luigi considered that, having lately been believed in, he could not afford to look untruthful, and replied with a sprightly ' Assuredly.'

' He was there, and he read the writing on the paper ? '

' Assuredly : right out loud, between puff-puff of his cigar.'

' His name is Lieutenant Pierson. Did not Antonio-Pericles tell you his name ? He will write to her : you will be the bearer of his letter to the signorina. I must see her reply. She is a good patriot ; so am I ; so are you. Good patriots must be prudent. I tell you, I must see her reply to this Lieutenant Pierson.' Barto stuck his thumb and finger astride Luigi's shoulder and began rocking him gently, with a horrible meditative expression. ' You will have to accomplish this, my Luigi. All fair excuses will be made, if you fail generally. This you must do. Keep upright while I am speaking to you ! The excuses will be made ; but I, not you, must make them : bear that in mind. Is there any person whom you, my Luigi, like best in the world ? '

It was a winning question, and though Luigi was not the dupe of its insinuating gentleness, he answered, ' The little girl who carries flowers every morning to the caffè La Scala.'

' Ah ! the little girl who carries flowers every morning to the caffè La Scala. Now, my Luigi, you may fail me, and I may pardon you. Listen attentively : if you are false ; if you are guilty of one piece of treachery :—do you see ? You can't help slipping, but you can help jumping. Restrain yourself from jumping, that 's all. If you are guilty of treachery, hurry at once, straight off, to the little girl who carries flowers every morning to the caffè La Scala. Go to her, take her by the two cheeks, kiss her, say

to her "addio, addio," for, by the thunder of heaven! you will never see her more.'

Luigi was rocked forward and back, while Barto spoke in level tones, till the voice dropped into its vast hollow, when Barto held him fast a moment, and hurled him away by the simple lifting of his hand.

The woman appeared and bound Luigi's eyes. Barto did not utter another word. On his journey back to daylight, Luigi comforted himself by muttering oaths that he would never again enter into this trap. As soon as his eyes were unbandaged, he laughed, and sang, and tossed a compliment from his finger-tips to the savage-browed beauty; pretended that he had got an armful, and that his heart was touched by the ecstasy; and sang again: 'Oh, Barto, Barto! my boot is sadly worn. The toe is seen,' etc., half-way down the stanzas. Without his knowing it, and before he had quitted the court, he had sunk into songless gloom, brooding on the scenes of the night. However free he might be in body, his imagination was captive to Barto Rizzo. He was no luckier than a bird, for whom the cage is open that it may feel the more keenly with its little taste of liberty that it is tied by the leg.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LETTER

The importance of the matters extracted from Luigi does not lie on the surface; it will have to be seen through Barto Rizzo's mind. This man regarded himself as the mainspring of the conspiracy; specially its guardian, its wakeful Argus. He had conspired sleeplessly for thirty years; so long, that having no ideal reserve in his nature,

conspiracy had become his professional occupation,—the wheel which it was his business to roll. He was above jealousy ; he was above vanity. No one outstripping him cast a bad colour on him ; nor did he object to bow to another as his superior. But he was prepared to suspect every one of insincerity and of faithlessness ; and, being the master of the machinery of the plots, he was ready, upon a whispered justification, to despise the orders of his leader, and act by his own light in blunt disobedience. For it was his belief that while others speculated he knew all. He knew where the plots had failed ; he knew the man who had bent and doubled. In the patriotic cause, perfect arrangements are crowned with perfect success, unless there is an imperfection of the instruments ; for the cause is blessed by all superior agencies. Such was his governing idea. His arrangements had always been perfect ; hence the deduction was a denunciation of some one particular person. He pointed out the traitor here, the traitor there ; and in one or two cases he did so with a mildness that made those fret at their beards vaguely who understood his character. Barto Rizzo was, it was said, born in a village near Forlì, in the dominions of the Pope ; according to the rumour, he was the child of a veiled woman and a cowled paternity. If not an offender against Government, he was at least a wanderer early in life. None could accuse him of personal ambition. He boasted that he had served as a common soldier with the Italian contingent furnished by Eugène to the Moscow campaign ; he showed scars of old wounds : brown spots, and blue spots, and twisted twine of white skin, dotting the wrist, the neck, the calf, the ankle, and looking up from them, he slapped them proudly. Nor had he personal animosities of any kind. One sharp scar, which he called his shoulder-knot, he owed to the knife of a friend, by name Sarpo, who had things ready to betray him, and struck him, in antici-

pation of that tremendous moment of surprise and wrath when the awakened victim frequently is nerved with devil's strength ; but, striking, like a novice, on the bone, the stilet stuck there ; and Barto coolly got him to point the outlet of escape, and walked off, carrying the blade where the terrified assassin had planted it. This Sarpo had become a tradesman in Milan—a bookseller and small printer ; and he was unmolested. Barto said of him, that he was as bad as a few odd persons thought himself to be, and had in him the making of a great traitor ; but, that as Sarpo hated him and had sought to be rid of him for private reasons only, it was a pity to waste on such a fellow steel that should serve the Cause. 'While I live,' said Barto, 'my enemies have a tolerably active conscience.'

The absence of personal animosity in him was not due to magnanimity. He doubted the patriotism of all booksellers. He had been twice betrayed by women. He never attempted to be revenged on them ; but he doubted the patriotism of all women. 'Use them ; keep eye on them,' he said. In Venice he had conspired when he was living there as the clerk of a notary ; in Bologna subsequently while earning his bread as a petty schoolmaster. His evasions, both of Papal sbirri and the Austrian polizia, furnished instances of astonishing audacity that made his name a byword for mastery in the hour of peril. His residence in Milan now, after seven years of exile in England and Switzerland, was an act of pointed defiance, incomprehensible to his own party, and only to be explained by the prevalent belief that the authorities feared to provoke a collision with the people by laying hands on him. They had only once made a visitation to his house, and appeared to be satisfied at not finding him. At that period Austria was simulating benevolence in her Lombardic provinces, with the half degree of persuasive earnestness which makes a Government lax in its vigilance,

and leaves it simply open to the charge of effeteness. There were contradictory rumours as to whether his house had ever been visited by the polizia ; but it was a legible fact that his name was on the window, and it was understood that he was not without elusive contrivances in the event of the authorities declaring war against him.

Of the nature of these contrivances Luigi had just learnt something. He had heard Barto Rizzo called 'The Miner' and 'The Great Cat,' and he now comprehended a little of the quality of his employer. He had entered a very different service from that of the signor Antonio-Pericles, who paid him for nothing more than to keep eye on Vittoria, and recount her goings in and out ; for what absolute object he was unaware, but that it was not for a political one he was certain. 'Cursed be the day when the lust of gold made me open my hand to Barto Rizzo !' he thought ; and could only reflect that life is short and gold is sweet, and that he was in the claws of the Great Cat. He had met Barto in a wine-shop. He cursed the habit which led him to call at that shop ; the thirst which tempted him to drink : the ear which had been seduced to listen. Yet as all his expenses had been paid in advance, and his reward at the instant of his application for it ; and as the signorina and Barto were both good patriots, and he, Luigi, was a good patriot, what harm could be done to her ? Both she and Barto had stamped their different impressions on his waxen nature. He reconciled his service to them separately by the exclamation that they were both good patriots.

The plot for the rising in Milan city was two months old. It comprised some of the nobles of the city, and enjoyed the good wishes of the greater part of them, whose payment of fifty to sixty per cent. to the Government on the revenue of their estates was sufficient reason for a desire to change masters, positively though they might detest

Republicanism, and dread the shadow of anarchy. These looked hopefully to Charles Albert. Their motive was to rise, or to countenance a rising, and summon the ambitious Sardinian monarch with such assurances of devotion, that a Piedmontese army would be at the gates when the banner of Austria was in the dust. Among the most active members of the prospectively insurgent aristocracy of Milan was Count Medole, a young nobleman of vast wealth and possessed of a reliance on his powers of mind that induced him to take a prominent part in the opening deliberations, and speedily necessitated his hire of the friendly offices of one who could supply him with facts, with suggestions, with counsel, with fortitude, with everything to strengthen his pretensions to the leadership, excepting money. He discovered his man in Barto Rizzo, who quitted the ranks of the republican section to serve him, and wield a tool for his own party. By the help of Agostino Balderini, Carlo Ammiani, and others, the aristocratic and the republican sections of the conspiracy were brought near enough together to permit of a common action between them, though the maintaining of such harmony demanded an extreme and tireless delicacy of management. The presence of the Chief, whom we have seen on the Motterone, was claimed by other cities of Italy. Unto him solely did Barto Rizzo yield thorough adhesion. He being absent from Milan, Barto undertook to represent him and carry out his views. How far he was entitled to do so may be guessed when it is stated that, on the ground of his general contempt for women, he objected to the proposition that Vittoria should give the signal. The proposition was Agostino's. Count Medole, Barto, and Agostino discussed it secretly: Barto held resolutely against it, until Agostino thrust a sly-handed letter into his fingers and let him know that previous to any consultation on the subject he had gained the consent of his Chief.

Barto then fell silent. He despatched his new spy, Luigi, to the Motterone, more for the purpose of giving him a schooling on the expedition, and on his return from it, and so getting hand and brain and soul service out of him. He expected no such a report of Vittoria's indiscretion as Luigi had spiced with his one foolish lie. That she should tell the relatives of an Austrian officer that Milan was soon to be a dangerous place for them ;—and that she should write it on paper and leave it for the officer to read,—left her, according to Barto's reading of her, open to the alternative charges of imbecility or of treachery. Her letter to the English lady, the Austrian officer's sister, was an exaggeration of the offence, but lent it more the look of heedless folly. The point was to obtain sight of her letter to the Austrian officer himself. Barto was baffled during a course of anxious days that led closely up to the fifteenth. She had written no letter. Lieutenant Pierson, the officer in question, had ridden into the city once from Verona, and had called upon Antonio-Pericles to extract her address from him ; the Greek had denied that she was in Milan. Luigi could tell no more. He described the officer's personal appearance, by saying that he was a recognizable Englishman in Austrian dragoon uniform ;—white tunic, white helmet, brown moustache ;—ay ! and eh ! and oh ! and ah ! coming frequently from his mouth ; that he stood square while speaking, and seemed to like his own smile ;—an extraordinary touch of portraiture, or else a scoff at insular self-satisfaction ; at any rate, it commended itself to the memory. Barto dismissed him, telling him to be daily in attendance on the English lady.

Barto Rizzo's respect for the Chief was at war with his intense conviction that a blow should be struck at Vittoria even upon the narrow information which he possessed. Twice betrayed, his dreams and haunting thoughts cried ' Shall a woman betray you thrice ? ' In his imagination

he stood identified with Italy : the betrayal of one meant that of both. Falling into a deep reflection, Barto counted over his hours of conspiracy : he counted the Chief's ; comparing the two sets of figures he discovered, that as he had suspected, he was the elder in the patriotic work : therefore, if he bowed his head to the Chief, it was a voluntary act, a form of respect, and not the surrendering of his judgement. He was on the spot : the Chief was absent. Barto reasoned that the Chief could have had no experience of women, seeing that he was ready to trust in them. 'Do I trust to my pigeon, my sling-stone ? ' he said jovially to the thick-browed, splendidly ruddy young woman, who was his wife ; 'do I trust her ? Not half a morsel of her ! ' This young woman, a peasant woman of remarkable personal attractions, served him with the fidelity of a fascinated animal, and the dumbness of a wooden vessel. She could have hanged him, had it pleased her. She had all his secrets : but it was not vain speaking on Barto Rizzo's part ; he was master of her will ; and on the occasions when he showed that he did not trust her, he was careful at the same time to shock and subdue her senses. Her report of Vittoria was, that she went to the house of the signora Laura Piaveni, widow of the latest heroic son of Milan, and to that of the maestro Rocco Ricci ; to no other. It was also Luigi's report.

'She 's true enough,' the woman said, evidently permitting herself to entertain an opinion ; a sign that she required fresh schooling.

'So are you,' said Barto, and eyed her in a way that made her ask, 'Now, what 's for me to do ? '

He thought awhile.

'You will see the colonel. Tell him to come in corporal's uniform. What 's the little wretch twisting her body for ? Shan't I embrace her presently if she 's obedient ? Send to the polizia. You believe your husband is in the city,

and will visit you in disguise at the corporal's hour. They seize him. They also examine the house up to the point where we seal it. Your object is to learn whether the Austrians are moving men upon Milan. If they are—I learn something. When the house has been examined, our court here will have rest for a good month ahead ; and it suits me not to be disturbed. Do this, and we will have a red-wine evening in the house, shut up alone, my snake ! my pepper-flower ! '

It happened that Luigi was entering the court to keep an appointment with Barto when he saw a handful of the polizia burst into the house and drag out a soldier, who was in the uniform, as he guessed it to be, of the Prohaska regiment. The soldier struggled and offered money to them. Luigi could not help shouting, ' You fools ! don't you see he 's an officer ? ' Two of them took their captive aside. The rest made a search through the house. While they were doing so Luigi saw Barto Rizzo's face at the windows of the house opposite. He clamoured at the door, but Barto was denied to him there. When the polizia had gone from the court, he was admitted and allowed to look into every room. Not finding him, he said, 'Barto Rizzo does not keep his appointments, then!' The same words were repeated in his ear when he had left the court, and was in the street running parallel with it. ' Barto Rizzo does not keep his appointments, then ! ' It was Barto who smacked him on the back, and spoke out his own name with brown-faced laughter in the bustling street. Luigi was so impressed by his cunning and his recklessness that he at once told him more than he wished to tell :—The Austrian officer was with his sister, and had written to the signorina, and Luigi had delivered the letter ; but the signorina was at the maestro's, Rocco Ricci's, and there was no answer : the officer was leaving for Verona in the morning. After telling so much, Luigi

drew back, feeling that he had given Barto his full measure and owed to the signorina what remained.

Barto probably read nothing of the mind of his spy, but understood that it was a moment for distrust of him. Vittoria and her mother lodged at the house of one Zotti, a confectioner, dwelling between the Duomo and La Scala. Luigi, at Barto's bidding, left word with Zotti that he would call for the signorina's answer to a certain letter about sunrise. 'I promised my Rosellina, my poppy-headed sipper, a red-wine evening, or I would hold this fellow under my eye till the light comes,' thought Barto misgivingly, and let him go. Luigi slouched about the English lady's hotel. At nightfall her brother came forth. Luigi directed him to be in the square of the Duomo by sunrise, and slipped from his hold; the officer ran after him some distance. 'She can't say I was false to her now,' said Luigi, dancing with nervous ecstasy. At sunrise Barto Rizzo was standing under the shadow of the Duomo. Luigi passed him and went to Zotti's house, where the letter was placed in his hand, and the door shut in his face. Barto rushed to him, but Luigi, with a vixenish countenance, standing like a humped cat, hissed, 'Would you destroy my reputation and have it seen that I deliver up letters, under the noses of the writers, to the wrong persons?—ha! pestilence!' He ran, Barto following him. They were crossed by the officer on horseback, who challenged Luigi to give up the letter, which was very plainly being thrust from his hand into his breast. The officer found it no difficult matter to catch him and pluck the letter from him; he opened it, reading it on the jog of the saddle as he cantered off. Luigi turned in a terror of expostulation to ward Barto's wrath. Barto looked at him hard, while he noted the matter down on the tablet of an ivory book. All he said was, 'I have that letter!' stamping the assertion with an oath. Half-an-hour later

Luigi saw Barto in the saddle, tight-legged about a rusty beast, evidently bound for the South-eastern gate, his brows set like a black wind. 'Blessings on his going! thought Luigi, and sang one of his street-songs :—

'O lemons, lemons, what a taste you leave in the mouth! I desire you, I love you, but when I suck you, I 'm all caught up in a bundle and turn to water, like a wry-faced fountain. Why not be satisfied by a sniff at the blossoms? There 's gratification. Why did you grow up from the precious little sweet chuck that you were, Marietta? Lemons, O lemons! such a thing as a decent appetite is not known after sucking at you.'

His natural horror of a resolute man, more than fear (of which he had no recollection in the sunny Piazza), made him shiver and gave his tongue an acid taste at the prospect of ever meeting Barto Rizzo again. There was the prospect also that he might never meet him again.

CHAPTER IX

IN VERONA

The lieutenant read these lines, as he clattered through the quiet streets toward the Porta Tosa :—

'Dear Friend,—I am glad that you remind me of our old affection, for it assures me that yours is not dead. I cannot consent to see you yet. I would rather that we should not meet.

'I thought I would sign my name here, and say, "God bless you, Wilfrid; go!"

'Oh! why have you done this thing! I must write on. It seems like my past life laughing at me, that my old

friend should have come here in Italy, to wear the detestable uniform. How can we be friends when we must act as enemies ? We shall soon be in arms, one against the other. I pity you, for you have chosen a falling side ; and when you are beaten back, you can have no pride in your country, as we Italians have ; no delight, no love. They will call you a mercenary soldier. I remember that I used to have the fear of your joining our enemies, when we were in England, but it seemed too much for my reason.

'You are with a band of butchers. If I could see you and tell you the story of Giacomo Piaveni, and some other things, I believe you would break your sword instantly.

'There is time. Come to Milan on the fifteenth. You will see me then. I appear at La Scala. Promise me, if you hear me, that you will do exactly what I make you feel it right to do. Ah, *you* will not, though thousands will ! But step aside to me, when the curtain falls, and remain—oh, dear friend ! I write in honour to you ; we have sworn to free the city and the country—remain among us : break your sword, tear off your uniform ; we are so strong that we are irresistible. I know what a hero you can be on the field : then, why not in the true cause ? I do not understand that you should waste your bravery under that ugly flag, bloody and past forgiveness.

'I shall be glad to have news of you all, and of England. The bearer of this is a trusty messenger, and will continue to call at the hotel. A. is offended that I do not allow my messenger to give my address ; but I must not only be hidden, I must have peace, and forget you all until I have done my task. Addio. We have both changed names. I am the same. Can I think that you are ? Addio, dear friend.

'VITTORIA.'

Lieutenant Pierson read again and again the letter of her whom he had loved in England, to get new lights from it, as lovers do when they have lost the power to take single impressions. He was the bearer of a verbal despatch from the commandant in Milan to the Marshal in Verona. At that period great favour was shown to Englishmen in the Austrian service, and the lieutenant's uncle being a General of distinction, he had a sort of semi-attachment to the Marshal's staff, and was hurried to and fro, for the purpose of keeping him out of duelling scrapes, as many of his friendlier comrades surmised. The right to the distinction of exercising staff-duties is, of course, only to be gained by stout competitorship in the Austrian service; but favour may do something for a young man even in that rigorous school of Arms. He had to turn to Brescia on his way, and calculated that if luck should put good horses under him, he would enter Verona gates about sunset. Meantime, there was Vittoria's letter to occupy him as he went.

We will leave him to his bronzing ride through the mulberries and the grapes, and the white and yellow and arid hues of the September plain, and make acquaintance with some of his comrades of that proud army which Vittoria thought would stand feebly against the pouring tide of Italian patriotism.

The fairest of the cities of the plain had long been a nest of foreign soldiery. The life of its beauty was not more visible then than now. Within the walls there are glimpses of it, that belong rather to the haunting spirit than to the life. Military science has made a mailed giant of Verona, and a silent one, save upon occasion. Its face grins of war, like a skeleton of death; the salient image of the skull and congregating worms was one that Italian lyrists applied naturally to Verona.

The old Field-Marshal and chief commander of the

Austrian forces in Lombardy, prompted by the counsels of his sagacious adlatus, the chief of the staff, was engaged at that period in adding some of those ugly round walls and flanking bastions to Verona, upon which, when Austria was thrown back by the first outburst of the insurrection and the advance of the Piedmontese, she was enabled to plant a sturdy hind-foot, daring her foes as from a rock of defence.

A group of officers, of the cavalry, with a few infantry uniforms skirting them, were sitting in the pleasant cooling evening air, fanned by the fresh springing breeze, outside one of the Piazza Bra caffès, close upon the shadow of the great Verona amphitheatre. They were smoking their attenuated long straw cigars, sipping iced lemonade or coffee, and talking the common talk of the garrison officers, with perhaps that additional savour of a robust immorality which a Viennese social education may give. The rounded ball of the brilliant September moon hung still aloft, lighting a fathomless sky as well as the fair earth. It threw solid blackness from the old savage walls almost to a junction with their indolent outstretched feet. Itinerant street music twittered along the Piazza; officers walked arm-in-arm; now in moonlight bright as day, now in a shadow black as night: distant figures twinkled with the alternation. The light lay like a blade's sharp edge around the massive circle. Of Italians of a superior rank, Verona sent none to this resort. Even the melon-seller stopped beneath the arch ending the Stradone Porta Nuova, as if he had reached a marked limit of his popular customers.

This isolation of the rulers of Lombardy had commenced in Milan, but, owing to particular causes, was not positively defined there as it was in Verona. War was already rageing between the Veronese ladies and the officers of Austria. According to the Gallic Terpsichorean code,

a lady who permits herself to make election of her partners and to reject applicants to the honour of her hand in the dance, when that hand is disengaged, has no just ground of complaint if a glove should smite her cheek. The Austrians had to endure this sort of rejection in Ball-rooms. On the promenade their features were forgotten. They bowed to statues. Now, the officers of Austria who do not belong to a Croat regiment, or to one drawn from any point of the extreme East of the empire, are commonly gentlemanly men ; and though they can be vindictive after much irritation, they may claim at least as good a reputation for forbearance in a conquered country as our officers in India. They are not ill-humoured, and they are not peevishly arrogant, except upon provocation. The conduct of the tender Italian dames was vexatious. It was exasperating to these knights of the slumbering sword to hear their native waltzes sounding of exquisite Vienna, while their legs stretched in melancholy inactivity on the Piazza pavement, and their arms encircled no ductile waists. They tried to despise it more than they disliked it, called their female foes Amazons, and their male by a less complimentary title, and so waited for the patriotic epidemic to pass.

A certain Captain Weisspriess, of the regiment named after a sagacious monarch whose crown was the sole flourishing blossom of diplomacy, particularly distinguished himself by insisting that a lady should remember him in public places. He was famous for skill with his weapons. He waltzed admirably ; erect as under his Field-Marshal's eye. In the language of his brother officers, he was successful ; that is, even as God Mars when Bellona does not rage. Captain Weisspriess (Johann Nepomuk, Freiherr von Scheppenhausen) resembled in appearance one in the Imperial Royal service,

a gambling General of Division, for whom Fame had not yet blown her blast. Rumour declared that they might be relatives ; a little-scrupulous society did not hesitate to mention how. The captain's moustache was straw-coloured ; he wore it beyond the regulation length and caressed it infinitely. Surmounted by a pair of hot eyes, wavering in their direction, this grand moustache was a feature to be forgotten with difficulty, and Weisspriess was doubtless correct in asserting that his face had endured a slight equal to a buffet. He stood high and square-shouldered ; the flame of the moustache streamed on either side his face in a splendid curve ; his vigilant head was loftily posted to detect what he chose to construe as insult, or gather the smiles of approbation, to which, owing to the unerring judgement of the sex, he was more accustomed. Handsome or not, he enjoyed the privileges of masculine beauty.

This captain of a renown to come pretended that a superb Venetian lady of the Branciani family was bound to make response in public to his private signals, and publicly to reply to his salutations. He refused to be as a particle in space floating airily before her invincible aspect. Meeting her one evening, ere sweet Italy had exiled herself from the Piazza, he bowed, and stepping to the front of her, bowed pointedly. She crossed her arms and gazed over him. He called up a thing to her recollection in resonant speech. Shameful lie, or shameful truth, it was uttered in the hearing of many of his brother officers, of three Italian ladies, and of an Italian gentleman, Count Broncini, attending them. The lady listened calmly. Count Broncini smote him on the face. That evening the lady's brother arrived from Venice, and claimed his right to defend her. Captain Weisspriess ran him through the body, and attached a sinister label to his corpse. This he did not so much from brutality ;

the man felt that henceforth while he held his life he was at war with every Italian gentleman of mettle. Count Broncini was his next victim. There, for a time, the slaughtering business of the captain stopped. His brother officers of the better kind would not have excused him at another season, but the avenger of their irritation and fine vindicator of the merits of Austrian steel, had a welcome truly warm, when at the termination of his second duel he strode into mess, or what serves for an Austrian regimental mess.

It ensued naturally that there was everywhere in Verona a sharp division between the Italians of all classes and their conquerors. The great green-rinded melons were never wheeled into the neighbourhood of the white-coats. Damsels were no longer coquettish under the military glance, but hurried by in couples; and there was much scowling mixed with derisive servility, throughout the city, hard to be endured without that hostile state of the spirit which is the military mind's refuge in such cases. Itinerant musicians, and none but this fry, continued to be attentive to the dispensers of soldi.

The Austrian army prides itself upon being a brotherhood. Discipline is very strict, but all commissioned officers, when off duty, are as free in their intercourse as big boys. The General accepts a cigar from the lieutenant, and in return lifts his glass to him. The General takes an interest in his lieutenant's love-affairs: nor is the latter shy when he feels it his duty modestly to compliment his superior officer upon a recent conquest. There is really good fellowship both among the officers and in the ranks, and it is systematically encouraged.

The army of Austria was in those days the Austrian Empire. Outside the army the empire was a jealous congery of intriguing disaffected nationalities. The same policy which played the various States against one

another in order to reduce all to subserviency to the central Head, erected a privileged force wherein the sentiment of union was fostered till it became a nationality of the sword. Nothing more fatal can be done for a country ; but for an army it is a simple measure of wisdom. Where the password is MARCH, and not DEVELOP, a body of men, to be a serviceable instrument, must consent to act as one. Hannibal is the historic example of what a General can accomplish with tribes who are thus enrolled in a new citizenship ; and (as far as we know of him and his fortunes) he appears to be an example of the necessity of the fusing fire of action to congregated aliens in arms. When Austria was fighting year after year, and being worsted in campaign after campaign, she lost foot by foot, but she held together soundly ; and more than the baptism, the atmosphere of strife has always been required to give her a healthy vitality as a centralized empire. She knew it ; this (apart from the famous promptitude of the Hapsburgs) was one secret of her dauntless readiness to fight. War did the work of a smithy for the iron and steel holding her together ; and but that war costs money, she would have been an empire distinguished by aggressiveness. The next best medicinal thing to war is the military occupation of insurgent provinces. The soldiery soon feel where their home is, and feel the pride of atomies in unitive power, when they are sneered at, hooted, pelted, stabbed upon a gross misinterpretation of the slightness of moral offences, shamefully abused for doing their duty with a considerate sense of it, and too accurately divided from the inhabitants of the land they hold. In Italy, the German, the Czech, the Magyar, the Croat, even in general instances the Italian, clung to the standard for safety, for pay, for glory, and all became pre-eminently Austrian soldiers ; little besides.

It was against a power thus bound in iron hoops, that Italy, dismembered, and jealous, and corrupt, with an organization promoted by passion chiefly, was preparing to rise. In the end, a country true to itself and determined to claim God's gift to brave men will overmatch a mere army, however solid its force. But an inspired energy of faith is demanded of it. The intervening chapters will show pitiable weakness, and such a schooling of disaster as makes men, looking on the surface of things, deem the struggle folly. As well, they might say, let yonder scuffling vagabonds up any of the Veronese side-streets fall upon the patrol marching like one man, and hope to overcome them! In Vienna there was often despair: but it never existed in the Austrian camp. Vienna was frequently double-dealing and time-serving: her force in arms was like a trained man feeling his muscle. Thus, when the Government thought of temporizing, they issued orders to Generals whose one idea was to strike the blow of a mallet.

At this period there was no suspicion of any grand revolt being in process of development. The abounding dissatisfaction was treated as nothing more than the Italian disease showing symptoms here and there, and Vienna counselled measures mildly repressive;—'conciliating,' it was her pleasure to call them. Her recent commands with respect to turbulent Venice were the subject of criticism among the circle outside the Piazza caffè. An enforced inactivity of the military legs will quicken the military wits, it would appear, for some of the younger officers spoke hotly as to their notion of the method of ruling Venezia. One had bidden his Herr General to 'look here,' while he stretched forth his hand and declared that Italians were like women, and wanted —yes, *wanted*—(their instinct called for it) a beating, a real beating; as the emphatic would say in our

vernacular, a thundering thrashing, once a month :—' Or so,' the General added acquiescingly. A thundering thrashing, once a month or so, to these unruly Italians, because they are like women ! It was a youth who spoke, but none doubted his acquaintance with women, or cared to suggest that his education in that department of knowledge was an insufficient guarantee for his fitness to govern Venezia. Two young dragoon officers had approached during the fervid allocution, and after the salute to their superior, caught up chairs and stamped them down, thereupon calling for the loan of anybody's cigar-case. Where it is that an Austrian officer ordinarily keeps this instrument so necessary to his comfort, and obnoxious, one would suppose, to the rigid correctness of his shapely costume, we cannot easily guess. None can tell even where he stows away his pocket-handkerchief, or haply his purse. However, these things appear on demand. Several elongated cigar-cases were thrust forward, and then it was seen that the attire of the gallant youngsters was in disorder.

' Did you hunt her to earth ? ' they were asked.

The reply trenched on philosophy ; and consisted in an inquiry as to who cared for the whole basketful—of the like description of damsels, being implied. Immoderate and uproarious laughter burst around them. Both seemed to have been clawed impartially. Their tight-fitting coats bulged at the breast or opened at the waist, as though buttons were lacking, and the whiteness of that garment cried aloud for the purification of pipeclay. Questions flew. The damsel who had been pursued was known as a pretty girl, the daughter of a blacksmith, and no prolonged resistance was expected from one of her class. But, as it came out, she had said, a week past, ' I shall be stabbed if I am seen talking to you ' ; and therefore the odd matter was, not that she had, in tripping down the

Piazza with her rogue-eyed cousin from Milan, looked away and declined all invitation to moderate her pace and to converse, but that, after doubling down and about lonely streets, the length of which she ran as swiftly as her feet would carry her, at a corner of the Via Colomba she allowed herself to be caught—wilfully, beyond a doubt, seeing that she was not a bit breathed—allowed one quick taste of her lips, and then shrieked as naturally as a netted bird, and brought a hustling crowd just at that particular point to her rescue : not less than fifty, and all men. 'Not a woman among them ! ' the excited young officer repeated.

A veteran in similar affairs could see that he had the wish to remain undisturbed in his bewilderment at the damsel's conduct. Profound belief in her partiality for him perplexed his recent experience rather agreeably. Indeed, it was at this epoch an article of faith with the Austrian military that nothing save terror of their males kept sweet Italian women from the expression of their preference for the broad-shouldered, thick-limbed, yellow-haired warriors—the contrast to themselves which is supposed greatly to inspirit genial Cupid in the selection from his quiver.

'What became of her ? Did you let her go ? ' came pestering remarks, too absurd for replies if they had not been so persistent.

'Let her go ? In the devil's name, how was I to keep my hold of her in a crowd of fifty of the fellows, all mowing, and hustling, and elbowing—every rascal stinking right under my nose like the pit ? '

''Hem ! ' went the General present. 'As long as you did not draw ! Unsheathe, a minute.'

He motioned for a sight of their naked swords.

The couple of young officers flushed.

'Herr General ! Pardon ! ' they remonstrated.

'No, no. I know how boys talk; I 've been one myself. Tutt! You tell the truth, of course; but the business is for me to know in what! how far! Your swords, gentlemen.'

'But, General!'

'Well? I merely wish to examine the blades.'

'Do you doubt our words?'

'Hark at them! Words? Are you lawyers? A soldier deals in acts. I don't want to know your words, but your deeds, my gallant lads. I want to look at the blades of your swords, my children. What was the last order? That on no account were we to provoke, or, if possibly to be avoided, accept a collision, etc. etc. The soldier in peace is a citizen, etc. No sword on any account, or for any excuse, to be drawn, etc. You all heard it? So, good! I receive your denial, my children. In addition, I merely desire to satisfy curiosity. Did the guard clear a way for you?'

The answer was affirmative.

'Your swords!'

One of them drew, and proffered the handle.

The other clasped the haft angrily, and with a resolute smack on it, settled it in the scabbard.

'Am I a prisoner, General?'

'Not at all!'

'Then I decline to surrender my sword.'

Another General officer happened to be sauntering by. Applauding with his hands, and choosing the Italian language as the best form of speech for the enunciation of ironical superlatives, he said :—

'Eccellentemente! most admirable! of a distinguished loftiness of moral grandeur: "Then I decline," etc.: you are aware that you are quoting? "*as the drummer-boy said to Napoleon.*" I think you forgot to add that? It is the same young soldier who utters these immense

things, which we can hardly get out of our mouths. So the little fellow towers! His moral greatness is as noisy as his drum. What 's wrong?'

'General Pierson, nothing 's wrong,' was replied by several voices; and some explained that Lieutenant Jenna had been called upon by General Schöneck to show his sword, and had refused.

The heroic defender of his sword shouted to the officer with whom General Pierson had been conversing: 'Here! Weisspriess!'

'What is it, my dear fellow? Speak, my good Jenna!'

The explanation was given, and full sympathy elicited from Captain Weisspriess, while the two Generals likewise whispered and nodded.

'Did you draw?' the captain inquired, yawning. 'You needn't say it in quite so many words, if you did. I shall be asked by the General presently; and owing to that duel pending 'twixt you and his nephew, of which he is aware, he may put a bad interpretation on your pepperiness.'

'The devil fetch his nephew!' returned the furious Lieutenant Jenna. 'He comes back to-night from Milan, and if he doesn't fight me to-morrow, I post him a coward. Well, about that business! My good Weisspriess, the fellows had got into a thick crowd all round, and had begun to *knead* me. Do you understand me? I felt their knuckles.'

'Ah, good, good!' said the captain. 'Then, you didn't draw, of course. What officer of the Imperial service would, under similar circumstances! That is my reply to the Emperor, if ever I am questioned. To draw would be to show that an Austrian officer relies on his good sword in the thick of his enemies;—against which, as you know, my Jenna, the Government have

issued an express injunction. I see you have lost a button. Did you sell it dear ? '

' A fellow parted with his ear for it.'

Lieutenant Jenna illustrated a particular cut from a turn of his wrist.

' *That* oughtn't to make a noise ? ' he queried somewhat anxiously.

' It won't hear one any longer, at all events,' said Captain Weisspriess ; and the two officers entered into the significance of the remark with enjoyment.

Meantime General Pierson had concluded an apparently humorous dialogue with his brother General, and the latter, now addressing Lieutenant Jenna, said : ' Since you prefer surrendering your person rather than your sword—it is good ! Report yourself at the door of my room to-night, at ten. I suspect that you *have* been blazing your steel, sir. They say, 'tis as ready to flash out as your temper.'

Several voices interposed : ' General ! what if he did draw ! '

' Silence. You have read the recent order. Orlando may have his Durindarda bare ; but you may not. Grasp that fact. The Government wish to make Christians of you, my children. One cheek being smitten, what should you do ? '

' Shall I show you, General ? ' cried a quick little subaltern.

' The order, my children, as received a fortnight since from our old Wien, commands you to offer the other cheek to the smiter.'

' So that a proper balance may be restored to both sides of the face,' General Pierson appended.

' And mark me,' he resumed. ' There may be doubts about the policy of anything, though I shouldn't counsel you to cherish them : but there 's no mortal doubt about

the punishment for this thing.' The General spoke sternly; and then relaxing the severity of his tone, he said, 'The desire of the Government is to make an army of Christians.'

'And a precious way of doing it!' interjected two or three of the younger officers. They perfectly understood how hateful the Viennese domination was to their chiefs, and that they would meet sympathy and tolerance for any extreme of irony, provided that they showed a disposition to be subordinate. For the bureaucratic order, whatever it was, had to be obeyed. The army might, and of course did, know best: nevertheless it was bound to be nothing better than a machine in the hands of the dull closeted men in Vienna, who judged of difficulties and plans of action from a calculation of numbers, or from foreign journals—from heaven knows what!

General Schöneck and General Pierson walked away laughing, and the younger officers were left to themselves. Half-a-dozen of them interlaced arms, striding up toward the Porta Nuova, near which, at the corner of the Via Trinità, they had the pleasant excitement of beholding a riderless horse suddenly in mid gallop sink on its knees and roll over. A crowd came pouring after it, and from the midst the voice of a comrade hailed them. 'It 's Pierson,' cried Lieutenant Jenna. The officers drew their swords, and hailed the guard from the gates. Lieutenant Pierson dropped in among their shoulders, dead from want of breath. They held him up, and finding him sound, thumped his back. The blade of his sword was red. He coughed with their thumpings, and sang out to them to cease; the idle mob which had been at his heels drew back before the guard could come up with them. Lieutenant Pierson gave no explanation except that he had been attacked near Juliet's tomb on his way to General Schöneck's quarters. Fellows had stabbed

his horse, and brought him to the ground, and torn the coat off his back. He complained in bitter mutterings of the loss of a letter therein, during the first candid moments of his anger: and, as he was known to be engaged to the Countess Lena von Lenkenstein, it was conjectured by his comrades that this lady might have had something to do with the ravishment of the letter. Great laughter surrounded him, and he looked from man to man. Allowance is naturally made for the irascibility of a brother officer coming tattered out of the hands of enemies, or Lieutenant Jenna would have construed his eye's challenge on the spot. As it was, he cried out, 'The letter! the letter! Charge, for the honour of the army, and rescue the letter!' Others echoed him: 'The letter! the letter! the English letter!' A foreigner in an army can have as much provocation as he pleases; if he is anything of a favourite with his superiors, his fellows will task his forbearance. Wilfrid Pierson glanced at the blade of his sword, and slowly sheathed it. 'Lieutenant Jenna is a good actor before a mob,' he said. 'Gentlemen, I rely upon you to make no noise about that letter; it is a private matter. In an hour or so, if any officer shall choose to question me concerning it, I will answer him.'

The last remnants of the mob had withdrawn. The officer in command at the gates threw a cloak over Wilfrid's shoulders; and taking the arm of a friend Wilfrid hurried to barracks, and was quickly in a position to report himself to his General, whose first remark, 'Has the dead horse been removed?' robbed him of his usual readiness to equivocate. 'When you are the bearer of a verbal despatch, come straight to quarters, if you have to come like a fig-tree on the north side of the wall in Winter,' said General Schöneck, who was joined presently by General Pierson.

'What 's this I hear of some letter you have been barking about all over the city?' the latter asked, after returning his nephew's on-duty salute.

Wilfrid replied that it was a letter of his sister's treating of family matters.

The two Generals, who were close friends, discussed the attack to which he had been subjected. Wilfrid had to recount it with circumstance: how, as he was nearing General Schöneck's quarters at a military trot, six men headed by a leader had dashed out on him from a narrow side-street, unhorsed him after a struggle, rifled the saddle-bags, and torn the coat from his back, and had taken the mark of his sword, while a gathering crowd looked on, hooting. His horse had fled, and he confessed that he had followed his horse. General Schöneck spoke the name of Countess Lena suggestively. 'Not a bit,' returned General Pierson; 'the fellow courts her too hotly. The scoundrels here want a bombardment; that 's where it lies. A dose of iron pills will make Verona a healthy place. She must have it.'

General Schöneck said, 'I hope not,' and laughed at the heat of Irish blood. He led Wilfrid in to the Marshal, after which Wilfrid was free to seek Lieutenant Jenna, who had gained the right to a similar freedom by pledging his honour not to fight within a stipulated term of days. The next morning Wilfrid was roused by an orderly coming from his uncle, who placed in his hands a copy of Vittoria's letter: at the end of it his uncle had written, 'Rather astonishing. Done pretty well; but by a foreigner. "Affection" spelt with one "f." An Italian: you will see the letters are emphatic at "ugly flag"; also "bloody and past forgiveness" very large; the copyist had a dash of the feelings of a commentator, and did his (or her) best to add an oath to it. Who the deuce, sir, is this opera girl calling herself Vittoria? I have a lecture

for you. German women don't forgive diversions during courtship ; and if you let this Countess Lena slip, your chance has gone. I compliment you on your power of lying ; but you must learn to show your right face to *me*, or the very handsome feature, your nose, and that useful box, your skull, will come to grief. The whole business is a mystery. The letter (copy) was directed to you, brought to me, and opened in a fit of abstraction, necessary to commanding uncles who are trying to push the fortunes of young noodles pretending to be related to them. Go to Countess Lena. Count Paul is with her, from Bologna. Speak to her, and observe her and him. He knows English—has been attached to the embassy in London ; but, pooh ! the hand 's Italian. I confess myself puzzled. We shall possibly have to act on the intimation of the fifteenth, and profess to be wiser than others. Something is brewing for business. See Countess Lena boldly, and then come and breakfast with me.'

Wilfrid read the miserable copy of Vittoria's letter, utterly unable to resolve anything in his mind, except that he would know among a thousand the leader of those men who had attacked him, and who bore the mark of his sword.

CHAPTER X

THE POPE'S MOUTH

Barto Rizzo had done what he had sworn to do. He had not found it difficult to outstrip the lieutenant (who had to visit Brescia on his way) and reach the gates of Verona in advance of him, where he obtained entrance among a body of grape-gatherers and others descending

from the hills to meet a press of labour in the autumnal plains. With them he hoped to issue forth unchallenged on the following morning ; but Wilfrid's sword had made lusty play ; and, as in the case when the order has been given that a man shall be spared in life and limb, Barto and his fellow-assailants suffered by their effort to hold him simply half a minute powerless. He received a shrewd cut across the head, and lay for a couple of hours senseless in the wine-shop of one Battista—one of the many all over Lombardy who had pledged their allegiance to the Great Cat, thinking him scarcely vulnerable. He read the letter, dizzy with pain, and with the frankness proper to inflated spirits after loss of blood, he owned to himself that it was not worth much as a prize. It was worth the attempt to get possession of it, for anything is worth what it costs, if it be only as a schooling in resolution, energy, and devotedness :—regrets are the sole admission of a fruitless business ; they show the bad tree ;—so, according to his principle of action, he deliberated ; but he was compelled to admit that Vittoria's letter was little else than a repetition of her want of discretion when she was on the Motterone. He admitted it, wrathfully : his efforts to convict this woman telling him she deserved some punishment ; and his suspicions being unsatisfied, he resolved to keep them hungry upon her, and return to Milan at once. As to the letter itself, he purposed, since the harm in it was accomplished, to send it back honourably to the lieutenant, till finding it blood-stained, he declined to furnish the gratification of such a sight to any Austrian sword. For that reason, he copied it, while Battista's wife held double bandages tight round his head : believing that the letter stood transcribed in a precisely similar hand, he forwarded it to Lieutenant Pierson, and then sank and swooned. Two days he lay incapable and let his thoughts dance

as they would. Information was brought to him that the gates were strictly watched, and that troops were starting for Milan. This was in the dull hour antecedent to the dawn. 'She is a traitress!' he exclaimed, and leaping from his bed, as with a brain striking fire, screamed, 'Traitress! traitress!' Battista and his wife had to fling themselves on him and gag him, guessing him as mad. He spoke pompously and theatrically; called himself the Eye of Italy, and said that he must be in Milan, or Milan would perish, because of the traitress: all with a great sullen air of composure and an odd distension of the eyelids. When they released him, he smiled and thanked them, though they knew, that had he chosen, he could have thrown off a dozen of them, such was his strength. The woman went down on her knees to him to get his consent that she should dress and bandage his head afresh. The sound of the regimental bugles drew him from the house, rather than any immediate settled scheme to watch at the gates.

Artillery and infantry were in motion before sunrise, from various points of the city, bearing toward the Palio and Zeno gates, and the people turned out to see them, for it was a march that looked like the beginning of things. The soldiers had green twigs in their hats, and kissed their hands good-humouredly to the gazing crowd, shouting bits of verses:—

'I 'm off! I 'm off! Farewell, Mariandl! if I come back a sergeant-major or a Field-Marshal, don't turn up your nose at me: Swear you will be faithful all the while; because, when a woman swears, it 's a comfort, somehow: Farewell! Squeeze the cow's udders: I shall be thirsty enough: You pretty wriggler! don't you know, the first cup of wine and the last, I shall float your name on it? Luck to the lads we leave behind! Farewell, Mariandl!'

The kindly fellows waved their hands and would take no rebuff. The soldiery of Austria are kindlier than most, until their blood is up. A Tyrolese regiment passed, singing splendidly in chorus. Songs of sentiment prevailed, but the traditions of a soldier's experience of the sex have informed his ballads with strange touches of irony, that help him to his (so to say) philosophy, which is recklessness. The Tyroler's 'Kätchen' here, was a saturnine Giulia, who gave him no response, either of eye or lip.

'Little mother, little sister, little sweetheart, adé! adé! My little sweetheart, your meadow is half-way up the mountain; it 's such a green spot on the eyeballs of a roving boy! and the chapel just above it, I shall see it as I 've seen it a thousand times; and the cloud hangs near it, and moves to the door and enters, for it is an angel, not a cloud; a white angel gone in to pray for Käterlein and me: Little mother, little sister, little sweetheart, adé! adé! Keep single, Käterlein, as long as you can: as long as you can hold out, keep single: adé!'

Fifteen hundred men and six guns were counted as they marched on to one gate.

Barto Rizzo, with Battista and his wife on each side of him, were among the spectators. The black cock's feathers of the Tyrolese were still fluttering up the Corso, when the woman said, 'I 've known the tail of a regiment get through the gates without having to show paper.'

Battista thereupon asked Barto whether he would try that chance. The answer was a vacuous shake of the head, accompanied by an expression of unutterable mournfulness. 'There 's no other way,' pursued Battista, 'unless you jump into the Adige, and swim down half-a-mile under water; and cats hate water—eh, my comico?'

He conceived that the sword-cut had rendered Barto imbecile, and pulled his hat down his forehead, and patted his shoulder, and bade him have cheer, patronizingly : but women do not so lightly lose their impression of a notable man. His wife checked him. Barto had shut his eyes, and hung swaying between them, as in drowsiness or drunkenness. Like his body, his faith was swaying within him. He felt it borne upon the reeling brain, and clung to it desperately, calling upon chance to aid him ; for he was weak, incapable of a physical or mental contest, and this part of his settled creed—that human beings alone failed the patriotic cause as instruments, while circumstances constantly befriended it—was shocked by present events. The image of Vittoria, the traitress, floated over the soldiery marching on Milan through her treachery. Never had an Austrian force seemed to him so terrible. He had to yield the internal fight, and let his faith sink and be blackened, in order that his mind might rest supine, according to his remembered system ; for the inspiration which points to the right course does not come during mental strife, but after it, when faith summons its agencies undisturbed—if only men will have the faith, and will teach themselves to know that the inspiration must come, and will counsel them justly. This was a part of Barto Rizzo's sustaining creed ; nor did he lose his grasp of it in the torment and the darkness of his condition.

He heard English voices. A carriage had stopped almost in front of him. A General officer was hat in hand, talking to a lady, who called him uncle, and said that she had been obliged to decide to quit Verona on account of her husband, to whom the excessive heat was unendurable. Her husband, in the same breath, protested that the heat killed him. He adorned the

statement with all kinds of domestic and subterranean imagery, and laughed faintly, saying that after the fifteenth—on which night his wife insisted upon going to the Opera at Milan to hear a new singer and old friend—he should try a week at the Baths of Bormio, and only drop from the mountains when a proper temperature reigned, he being something of an invalid.

'And, uncle, will you be in Milan on the fifteenth?' said the lady; 'and Wilfrid, too?'

'Wilfrid will reach Milan as soon as you do, and I shall undoubtedly be there on the fifteenth,' said the General.

'I cannot possibly express to you how beautiful I think your army looks,' said the lady.

'Fine men, General Pierson, very fine men. I never saw such marching—equal to our Guards,' her husband remarked.

The lady named her Milanese hotel as the General waved his plumes, nodded, and rode off.

Before the carriage had started, Barto Rizzo dashed up to it; and 'Dear good English lady,' he addressed her, 'I am the brother of Luigi, who carries letters for you in Milan—little Luigi!—and I have a mother dying in Milan; and here I am in Verona, ill, and can't get to her, poor soul! Will you allow me that I may sit up behind as quiet as a mouse, and be near one of the lovely English ladies who are so kind to unfortunate persons, and never deaf to the name of charity? It 's my mother who is dying, poor soul!'

The lady consulted her husband's face, which presented the total blank of one who refused to be responsible for an opinion hostile to the claims of charity, while it was impossible for him to fall in with foreign habits of familiarity, and accede to extraordinary petitions. Barto sprang up. 'I shall be your courier, dear lady,' he said,

and commenced his professional career in her service by shouting to the vetturino to drive on. Wilfrid met them as he was trotting down from the Porta del Palio, and to him his sister confided her new trouble in having a strange man attached to her, who might be anything. 'We don't know the man,' said her husband; and Adela pleaded for him: 'Don't speak to him harshly, pray, Wilfrid; he says he has a mother dying in Milan.' Barto kept his head down on his arms and groaned; Adela gave a doleful little grimace. 'Oh, take the poor beggar,' said Wilfrid; and sang out to him in Italian: 'Who are you—what are you, my fine fellow?' Barto groaned louder, and replied in Swiss-French from a smothering depth: 'A poor man, and the gracious lady's servant till we reach Milan.'

'I can't wait,' said Wilfrid; 'I start in half-an-hour. It 's all right; you must take him now you 've got him, or else pitch him out—one of the two. If things go on quietly we shall have the Autumn manœuvres in a week, and then you may see something of the army.' He rode away. Barto passed the gates as one of the licenced English family.

Milan was more strictly guarded than when he had quitted it. He had anticipated that it would be so, and tamed his spirit to submit to the slow stages of the carriage, spent a fiery night in Brescia, and entered the city of action on the noon of the fourteenth. Safe within the walls, he thanked the English lady, assuring her that her charitable deed would be remembered aloft. He then turned his steps in the direction of the Revolutionary post-office. This place was nothing other than a blank abutment of a corner house that had long been undergoing repair, and had a great bank of brick and mortar rubbish at its base. A stationary melon-seller and some black fig and vegetable stalls occupied

the triangular space fronting it. The removal of a square piece of cement showed a recess, where, chiefly during the night, letters and proclamation papers were deposited, for the accredited postman to disperse them. Hither, as one would go to a caffè for the news, Barto Rizzo came in the broad glare of noon, and flinging himself down like a tired man under the strip of shade, worked with a hand behind him, and drew out several folded scraps, of which one was addressed to him by his initials. He opened it and read :—

'Your house is watched.

'A corporal of the P . . . ka regiment was seen leaving it this morning in time for the second bugle.

'Reply :—where to meet.

'Spies are doubled, troops coming.

'The numbers in Verona ;—who heads them.

'Look to your wife.

'Letters are called for every third hour.'

Barto sneered indolently at this fresh evidence of the small amount of intelligence which he could ever learn from others. He threw his eyes all round the vacant space while pencilling in reply :—

'V. waits for M., but in a box' (that is, Verona for Milan). 'We take the key to her.

'I have no wife, but a little pupil.

'A Lieutenant Pierson, of the dragoons, Czech ;—white coats, helmets without plumes ; an Englishman, nephew of General Pierson : speaks crippled Italian ; returns from V. to-day. Keep eye on him ;—what house, what hour.'

Meditating awhile, Barto wrote out Vittoria's name and enclosed it in a thick black ring.

Beneath it he wrote :—

'The same on all the play-bills.

'The Fifteenth is cancelled.

'We meet the day after.

'At the house of Count M. to-night.'

He secreted this missive, and wrote Vittoria's name on numbers of slips to divers addresses, heading them, 'From the Pope's Mouth,' such being the title of the Revolutionary post-office, to whatsoever spot it might in prudence shift. The title was entirely complimentary to his Holiness. Tangible freedom, as well as airy blessings, were at that time anticipated, and not without warrant, from the mouth of the successor of St. Peter. From the Pope's Mouth the clear voice of Italian liberty was to issue. This sentiment of the period was a natural and a joyful one, and endowed the popular ebullition with a sense of unity and a stamp of righteousness that the abstract idea of liberty could not assure to it before martyrdom. After suffering, after walking in the shades of death and despair, men of worth and of valour cease to take high personages as representative objects of worship, even when these (as the good Pope was then doing) benevolently bless the nation and bid it to have great hope, with a voice of authority. But, for an extended popular movement a great name is like a consecrated banner. Proclamations from the Pope's Mouth exacted reverence, and Barto Rizzo, who despised the Pope (because he was Pope, doubtless), did not hesitate to make use of him by virtue of his office.

Barto lay against the heap of rubbish, waiting for the approach of his trained lad, Checco, a lanky simpleton, cunning as a pure idiot, who was doing postman's duty, when a kick, delivered by that youth behind, sent him bounding round with rage, like a fish in air. The market-place resounded with a clapping of hands; for it was here that Checco came daily to eat figs, and it was known that the 'povero,' the dear half-witted creature, would not tolerate an intruder in the place where he stretched

his limbs to peel and suck in the gummy morsels twice or thrice a day. Barto seized and shook him. Checco knocked off his hat; the bandage about the wound broke and dropped, and Barto put his hand to his forehead, murmuring: 'What 's come to me that I lose my temper with a boy—an animal?'

The excitement all over the triangular space was hushed by an imperious guttural shout that scattered the groups. Two Austrian officers, followed by military servants, rode side by side. Dust had whitened their mustachios, and the heat had laid a brown-red varnish on their faces. Way was made for them, while Barto stood smoothing his forehead and staring at Checco.

'I see the very man!' cried one of the officers quickly. 'Weisspriess, there 's the rascal who headed the attack on me in Verona the other day. It 's the same!'

'Himmel!' returned his companion, scrutinizing the sword-cut, 'if that 's your work on his head, you did it right well, my Pierson! He is very neatly scored indeed. A clean stroke, manifestly!'

'But here when I left Milan! at Verona when I entered the North-west gate there; and the first man I see as I come back is this very brute. He dogs me everywhere! By the way, there may be two of them.'

Lieutenant Pierson leaned over his horse's neck, and looked narrowly at the man Barto Rizzo. He himself was eyed as in retort, and with yet greater intentness. At first Barto's hand was sweeping the air within a finger's length of his forehead, like one who fought a giddiness for steady sight. The mist upon his brain dispersing under the gaze of his enemy, his eyeballs fixed, and he became a curious picture of passive malice, his eyes seeming to say: 'It is enough for me to know your features, and I know them.' Such a look from a

civilian is exasperating : it was scarcely to be endured from an Italian of the plebs.

'You appear to me to want more,' said the lieutenant audibly to himself ; and he repeated words to the same effect to his companion, in bad German.

'Eh ? You would promote him to another epaulette ? ' laughed Captain Weisspriess. 'Come off. Orders are direct against it. And we 're in Milan—not like being in Verona ! And my good fellow ! remember your bet ; the dozen of iced Rüdesheimer. I want to drink my share, and dream I 'm quartered in Mainz—the only place for an Austrian when he quits Vienna. Come.'

'No ; but if this is the villain who attacked me, and tore my coat from my back,' cried Wilfrid, screwing in his saddle.

'And took your letter—took your letter ; a particular letter ; we have heard of it,' said Weisspriess.

The lieutenant exclaimed that he should overhaul and examine the man, and see whether he thought fit to give him into custody. Weisspriess laid hand on his bridle.

'Take my advice, and don't provoke a disturbance in the streets. The truth is, you Englishmen and Irishmen get us a bad name among these natives. If this is the man who unhorsed you and maltreated you, and committed the rape of the letter, I 'm afraid you won't get satisfaction out of him, to judge by his look. I 'm really afraid not. Try it if you like. In any case, if you halt, I am compelled to quit your society, which is sometimes infinitely diverting. Let me remind you that you bear despatches. The other day they were verbal ones ; you are now carrying paper.'

'Are you anxious to teach me my duty, Captain Weisspriess ? '

'If you don't know it. I said I would "remind you." I can also teach you, if you need it.'

'And I can pay you for the instruction, whenever you are disposed to receive payment.'

'Settle your outstanding claims, my good Pierson!'

'When I have fought Jenna?'

'Oh! you're a Prussian—a Prussian!' Captain Weisspriess laughed. 'A Prussian, I mean, in your gross way of blurting out everything. I've marched and messed with Prussians—with oxen.'

'I am, as you are aware, an Englishman, Captain Weisspriess. I am due to Lieutenant Jenna for the present. After that you or any one may command me.'

'As you please,' said Weisspriess, drawing out one stream of his moustache. 'In the meantime, thank me for luring you away from the chances of a street row.'

Barto Rizzo was left behind, and they rode on to the Duomo. Glancing up at its pinnacles, Weisspriess said: 'How splendidly Flatschmann's jägers would pick them off from there, now, if the dogs were giving trouble in this part of the city!'

They entered upon a professional discussion of the ways and means of dealing with a revolutionary movement in the streets of a city like Milan, and passed on to the Piazza La Scala. Weisspriess stopped before the Play-bills. 'To-morrow's the fifteenth of the month,' he said. 'Shall I tell you a secret, Pierson? I am to have a private peep at the new prima donna this night. They say she's charming, and very pert. "I do not interchange letters with Germans." Benlomik sent her a neat little note to the conservatorio—he hadn't seen her: only heard of her, and that was our patriotic reply! She wants taming. I believe I am called upon for that duty. At least, my friend Antonio-Pericles, who occasionally assists me with supplies, hints as much to me.

You 're an engaged man, or, upon my honour, I wouldn't trust you ; but between ourselves, this Greek—and he 's quite right—is trying to get her away from the set of snuffy vagabonds who are prompting her for mischief, and don't know how to treat her.'

While he was speaking Barto Rizzo pushed roughly between them, and with a black brush painted the circle about Vittoria's name.

'Do you see that ? ' said Weisspriess.

'I see,' Wilfrid retorted, 'that you are ready to meddle with the reputation of any woman who is likely to be talked about. Don't do it in my presence.'

It was natural for Captain Weisspriess to express astonishment at this outburst, and the accompanying quiver of Wilfrid's lip.

'Austrian military etiquette, Lieutenant Pierson,' he said, 'precludes the suspicion that the officers of the Imperial army are subject to dissension in public. We conduct these affairs upon a different principle. But I 'll tell you what. That fellow's behaviour may be construed as a more than common stretch of incivility. I 'll do you a service. I 'll arrest him, and then you can hear tidings of your precious letter. We 'll have his confession published.'

Weisspriess drew his sword, and commanded the troopers in attendance to lay hands on Barto ; but the troopers called, and the officer found that they were surrounded. Weisspriess shrugged dismally. 'The brute must go, I suppose,' he said. The situation was one of those which were every now and then occurring in the Lombard towns and cities, when a chance provocation created a riot that became a revolt or not, according to the timidity of the ruling powers or the readiness of the disaffected. The extent and evident regulation of the crowd operated as a warning to the

Imperial officers. Weisspriess sheathed his sword and shouted, 'Way, there!' Way was made for him; but Wilfrid lingered to scrutinize the man who, for an unaccountable reason, appeared to be his peculiar enemy. Barto carelessly threaded the crowd, and Wilfrid, finding it useless to get out after him, cried, 'Who is he? Tell me the name of that man?' The question drew a great burst of laughter around him, and exclamations of 'Englishman! Englishman!' He turned where there was a clear way left for him in the track of his brother officer.

Comments on the petty disturbance had been all the while passing at the Caffè La Scala, where sat Agostino Balderini, with Count Medole and others, who, if the order for their arrest had been issued, were as safe in that place as in their own homes. Their policy, indeed, was to show themselves openly abroad. Agostino was enjoying the smoke of paper cigarettes, with all prudent regard for the well-being of an inflammable beard. Perceiving Wilfrid going by, he said, 'An Englishman! I continue to hope much from his countrymen. I have no right to do so, only they insist on it. They have promised, and more than once, to sail a fleet to our assistance across the plains of Lombardy, and I believe they will—probably in the watery epoch which is to follow Metternich. Behold my Carlo approaching. The heart of that lad doth so boil the brain of him, he can scarcely keep the lid on. What is it now? Speak, my son.'

Carlo Ammiani had to communicate that he had just seen a black circle to Vittoria's name on two public playbills. His endeavour to ape a deliberate gravity while he told the tale, roused Agostino's humouristic ire.

'Round *her* name?' said Agostino.

'Yes; in every bill.'

'Meaning that she is suspected!'

'Meaning any damnable thing you like.'

'It 's a device of the enemy.'

Agostino, glad of the pretext to recur to his habitual luxurious irony, threw himself back, repeating 'It 's a device of the enemy. Calculate, my son, that the enemy invariably knows all you intend to do: determine simply to astonish him with what you *do*. Intentions have lungs, Carlo, and depend on the circumambient air, which, if not designedly treacherous, is communicative. Deeds, I need not remark, are a different body. It has for many generations been our Italian error to imagine a positive blood relationship—not to say maternity itself—existing between intentions and deeds. Nothing of the sort! There is only the *intention* of a link to unite them. You perceive? It 's much to be famous for fine intentions, so we won't complain. Indeed, it 's not our business to complain, but Posterity's; for fine intentions are really rich possessions, but they don't leave grand legacies; that is all. They mean to possess the future: they are only the voluptuous sons of the present. It 's my belief, Carlino, from observation, apprehension, and other gifts of my senses, that our paternal government is not unacquainted with our intention to sing a song in a certain opera. And it may have learnt our clumsy method of enclosing names publicly, at the bidding of a non-appointed prosecutor, so to isolate or extinguish them. Who can say? Oh, ay! Yes! the machinery that can so easily be made rickety is to blame; we admit that; but if you will have a conspiracy like a Geneva watch, you must expect any slight interference with the laws that govern it to upset the mechanism altogether. Ah—a! look yonder, but not hastily, my Carlo. Checco is nearing us, and he knows that he has fellows after him. And if I guess right, he has a burden to deliver to one of us.'

Checco came along at his usual pace, and it was quite evident that he fancied himself under espionage. On two sides of the square a suspicious figure threaded its way in the line of shade not far behind him. Checco passed the caffè looking at nothing but the huge hands he rubbed over and over. The manifest agents of the polizia were nearing when Checco ran back, and began mouthing as in retort at something that had been spoken from the caffè as he shot by. He made a gabbling appeal on either side, and addressed the pair of apparent mouchards, in what, if intelligible, should have been the language of earnest entreaty. At the first word which the caffè was guilty of uttering, a fit of exasperation seized him, and the excitable creature plucked at his hat and sent it whirling across the open-air tables right through the doorway. Then, with a whine, he begged his followers to get his hat back for him. They complied.

'We only called "Illustrissimo!"' said Agostino, as one of the men returned from the interior of the caffè hat in hand.

'The Signori should have known better—it is an idiot,' the man replied. He was a novice: in daring to rebuke he betrayed his office.

Checco snatched his hat from his attentive friend grinning, and was away in a flash. Thereupon the caffè laughed, and laughed with an abashing vehemence that disconcerted the spies. They wavered in their choice of following Checco or not; one went a step forward, one pulled back; the loiterer hurried to rejoin his comrade, who was now for a retrograde movement, and standing together they swayed like two imperfectly jolly fellows, or ballet bandits, each plucking at the other, until at last the maddening laughter made them break, reciprocate cat-like hisses of abuse, and escape as they best could—lamentable figures.

'It says well for Milan that the Tedeschi can scrape up nothing better from the gutters than rascals the like of those for their service,' quoth Agostino. 'Eh, signor Conte?'

'That enclosure about La Vittoria's name on the bills is correct,' said the person addressed, in a low tone. He turned and indicated one who followed from the interior of the caffè.

'If Barto is to be trusted she is not safe,' the latter remarked. He produced a paper that had been secreted in Checco's hat. Under the date and the superscription of the Pope's Mouth, 'La Vittoria' stood out in the ominous heavily-pencilled ring: the initials of Barto Rizzo were in a corner. Agostino began smoothing his beard.

'He has discovered that she is not trustworthy,' said Count Medole, a young man of a premature gravity and partial baldness, who spoke habitually with a forefinger pressed flat on his long pointed chin.

'Do you mean to tell me, Count Medole, that you attach importance to a communication of this sort?' said Carlo, forcing an amazement to conceal his anger.

'I do, Count Ammiani,' returned the patrician conspirator.

'You really listen to a man you despise?'

'I do not despise him, my friend.'

'You cannot surely tell us that you allow such a man, on his sole authority, to blacken the character of the signorina?'

'I believe that he has not.'

'Believe? trust him? Then we are all in his hands. What can you mean? Come to the signorina herself instantly. Agostino, you now conduct Count Medole to her, and save him from the shame of subscribing to the monstrous calumny. I beg you to go with our Agostino,

Count Medole. It is time for you—I honour you for the part you have taken ; but it is time to act according to your own better judgement.'

Count Medole bowed.

'The filthy rat ! ' cried Ammiani, panting to let out his wrath.

'A serviceable dog,' Agostino remarked correctingly. 'Keep true to the form of animal, Carlo. He has done good service in his time.'

'*You* listen to the man ? ' Carlo said, now thoroughly amazed.

'An indiscretion is possible to woman, my lad. She may have been indiscreet in some way. I am compelled to admit the existence of possibilities.'

'Of all men, you, Agostino ! You call her daughter, and profess to love her.'

'You forget,' said Agostino sharply. 'The question concerns the country, not the girl.' He added in an underbreath, 'I think you are professing that you love her a little too strongly, and scarce give her much help as an advocate. The matter must be looked into. If Barto shall be found to have acted without just grounds, I am certain that Count Medole '—he turned suavely to the nobleman—'will withdraw confidence from him ; and that will be equivalent to a rope's-end for Barto. We shall see him to-night at your house ? '

'He will be there,' Medole said.

'But the harm 's done ; the mischief 's done ! And what 's to follow if you shall choose to consider this vile idiot justified ? ' asked Ammiani.

'She sings, and there is no rising,' said Medole.

'She is detached from the patriotic battery, for the moment : it will be better for her not to sing at all,' said Agostino. 'In fact, Barto has merely given us warning that—and things look like it—the Fifteenth is likely

to be an Austrian feast-day. Your arm, my son. We will join you to-night, my dear Count. Now, Carlo, I was observing, it appears to me that the Austrians are not going to be surprised by us, and it affords me exquisite comfort. Fellows prepared are never more than prepared for one day and another day; and they are sure to be in a state of lax preparation after a first and second disappointment. On the contrary, fellows surprised'—Agostino had recovered his old smile again—'fellows surprised may be expected to make use of the inspirations pertaining to genius. Don't you see?'

'Oh, cruel! I am sick of you all!' Carlo exclaimed. 'Look at her; think of her, with her pure dream of Italy and her noble devotion. And you permit a doubt to be cast on her!'

'Now, is it not true that you have an idea of the country not being worthy of her?' said Agostino, slyly. 'The Chief, I fancy, did not take certain facts into his calculation when he pleaded that the conspiratrix was the sum and completion of the conspirator. You will come to Medole's to-night, Carlo. You need not be too sweet to him, but beware of explosiveness. I, a Republican, am nevertheless a practical exponent of the sacrifices necessary to unity. I accept the local leadership of Medole—on whom I can never look without thinking of an unfeathered pie; and I submit to be assisted by the man Barto Rizzo. Do thou likewise, my son. Let your enamoured sensations follow that duty, and with a breezy space between. A conspiracy is an epitome of humanity, with a boiling power beneath it. You're no more than a bit of mechanism—happy if it goes at all!'

Agostino said that he would pay a visit to Vittoria in the evening. Ammiani had determined to hunt out

Barto Rizzo and the heads of the Clubs before he saw her. It was a relief to him to behold in the Piazza the Englishman who had exchanged cards with him on the Motterone. Captain Gambier advanced upon a ceremonious bow, saying frankly, in a more colloquial French than he had employed at their first interview, that he had to apologize for his conduct, and to request monsieur's excuse. 'If,' he pursued, 'that lady is the person whom I knew formerly in England as Mademoiselle Belloni, and is now known as Mademoiselle Vittoria Campa, may I beg you to inform her that, according to what I have heard, she is likely to be in some danger to-morrow?' What the exact nature of the danger was, Captain Gambier could not say.

Ammiani replied: 'She is in need of all her friends,' and took the pressure of the Englishman's hand, who would fain have asked more but for the stately courtesy of the Italian's withdrawing salute. Ammiani could no longer doubt that Vittoria's implication in the conspiracy was known.

CHAPTER XI

LAURA PIAVENI

After dark on the same day antecedent to the outbreak, Vittoria, with her faithful Beppo at her heels, left her mother to run and pass one comforting hour in the society of the signora Laura Piaveni and her children.

There were two daughters of a parasitical Italian nobleman, of whom one had married the patriot Giacomo Piaveni, and one an Austrian diplomatist, the Commendatore Graf von Lenkenstein. Count Serabiglione was traditionally parasitical. His ancestors all had

moved in Courts. The children of the House had illustrious sponsors. The House itself was a symbolical sunflower constantly turning toward Royalty. Great excuses are to be made for this, the last male descendant, whose father in his youth had been an Imperial page, and who had been nursed in the conception that Italy (or at least Lombardy) was a natural fief of Austria, allied by instinct and by interest to the holders of the Alps. Count Serabiglione mixed little with his countrymen,—the statement might be inversed,—but when, perchance, he was among them, he talked willingly of the Tedeschi, and voluntarily declared them to be gross, obstinate, offensive—bears, in short. At such times he would intimate in any cordial ear that the serpent was probably a match for the bear in a game of skill, and that the wisdom of the serpent was shown in his selection of the bear as his master, since, by the ordination of circumstances, master he must have. The count would speak pityingly of the poor depraved intellects which admitted the possibility of a coming Kingdom of Italy united: the lunatics who preached of it he considered a sort of self-elected targets for appointed files of Tyrolese jägers. But he was vindictive against him whom he called the professional doctrinaire, and he had vile names for the man. Acknowledging that Italy mourned her present woes, he charged this man with the crime of originating them:—and why? what was his object? He was, the count declared in answer, a born intriguer, a lover of blood, mad for the smell of it! —an Old Man of the Mountain; a sheaf of assassins; and more—the curse of Italy! There should be extradition treaties all over the world to bring this arch-conspirator to justice. The door of his conscience had been knocked at by a thousand bleeding ghosts, and nothing had opened to them. What was Italy in his

eyes ? A chess-board ; and Italians were the chessmen to this cold player with live flesh. England nourished the wretch, that she might undermine the peace of the Continent.

Count Serabiglione would work himself up in the climax of denunciation, and then look abroad frankly as one whose spirit had been relieved. He hated bad men ; and it was besides necessary for him to denounce somebody, and get relief of some kind. Italians edged away from him. He was beginning to feel that he had no country. The detested title 'Young Italy' hurried him into fits of wrath. 'I am,' he said, 'one of the Old Italians, if a distinction is to be made.' He assured his listeners that he was for his commune, his district, and aired his old-Italian prejudices delightedly ; clapping his hands to the quarrels of Milan and Brescia ; Florence and Siena—haply the feuds of villages—and the common North-Italian jealousy of the chief city. He had numerous capital tales to tell of village feuds, their date and origin, the stupid effort to heal them, and the wider consequent split ; saying, 'We have, all Italians, the tenacity, the unforgiveness, the fervent blood of pure Hebrews ; and a little more gaiety, perhaps ; together with a love of fair things. We can outlive ten races of conquerors.'

In this fashion he philosophized, or forced a kind of philosophy. But he had married his daughter to an Austrian, which was what his countrymen could not overlook, and they made him feel it. Little by little, half acquiescing, half protesting, and gradually denationalized, the count was edged out of Italian society, save of the parasitical class, which he very much despised. He was not a happy man. Success at the Imperial Court might have comforted him ; but a remorseless sensitiveness of his nature tripped his steps.

Bitter laughter rang throughout Lombardy when, in spite of his efforts to save his daughter's husband, Giacomo Piaveni suffered death. No harder blow had ever befallen the count: it was as good as a public proclamation that he possessed small influence. To have bent the knee was not afflicting to this nobleman's conscience: but it was an anguish to think of having bent the knee for nothing.

Giacomo Piaveni was a noble Italian of the young blood, son of a General loved by Eugène. In him the loss of Italy was deplorable. He perished by treachery at the age of twenty-three years. So splendid was this youth in appearance, of so sweet a manner with women, and altogether so gentle and gallant, that it was a widowhood for women to have known him: and at his death the hearts of two women who had loved him in rivalry became bound by a sacred tie of friendship. He, though not of distinguished birth, had the choice of an almost royal alliance in the first blush of his manhood. He refused his chance, pleading in excuse to Count Serabiglione, that he was in love with that nobleman's daughter, Laura; which it flattered the count to hear, but he had ever after a contempt for the young man's discretion, and was observed to shrug, with the smooth sorrowfulness of one who has been a prophet, on the day when Giacomo was shot. The larger estates of the Piaveni family, then in Giacomo's hands, were in a famous cheese-making district, producing a delicious cheese:—'white as lambkins!' the count would ejaculate most dolefully; and in a rapture of admiration, 'You would say, a marble quarry when you cut into it.' The theme was afflicting, for all the estates of Giacomo were for the time forfeit, and the pleasant agitation produced among his senses by the mention of the cheese reminded him at the same instant

that he had to support a widow with two children. The signora Piaveni lived in Milan, and the count her father visited her twice during the summer months, and wrote to her from his fitful Winter residences in various capital cities, to report progress in the settled scheme for the recovery of Giacomo's property, as well for his widow as for the heirs of his body. 'It is a duty,' Count Serabiglione said emphatically. 'My daughter can entertain no proposal until her children are duly established; or would she, who is young and lovely and archly capricious, continue to decline the very best offers of the Milanese nobility, and live on one flat in an old quarter of the city, instead of in a bright and handsome street, musical with equipages, and full of the shows of life?'

In conjunction with certain friends of the signora, the count worked diligently for the immediate restitution of the estates. He was ably seconded by the young princess of Schyll-Weilingen,—by marriage countess of Föhrendorf, duchess of Graätli, in central Germany, by which title she passed,—an Austrian princess; she who had loved Giacomo, and would have given all for him, and who now loved his widow. The extreme and painful difficulty was that the signora Piaveni made no concealment of her abhorrence of the House of Austria, and hatred of Austrian rule in Italy. The spirit of her dead husband had come to her from the grave, and warmed a frame previously indifferent to anything save his personal merits. It had been covertly communicated to her that if she performed due submission to the authorities, and lived for six months in good legal, that is to say, non-patriotic odour, she might hope to have the estates. The duchess had obtained this mercy for her, and it was much; for Giacomo's scheme of revolt had been conceived with a subtlety of genius, and contrived on a scale sufficient to incense any despotic lord of such a glorious milch-cow as

Lombardy. Unhappily the signora was more inspired by the remembrance of her husband than by consideration for her children. She received disaffected persons : she subscribed her money ostentatiously for notoriously patriotic purposes ; and she who, in her father's Como villa, had been a shy speechless girl, nothing more than beautiful, had become celebrated for her public letters, and the ardour of declamation against the foreigner which characterized her style. In the face of such facts, the estates continued to be withheld from her governance. Austria could do that : she could wreak her spite against the woman, but she respected her own law even in a conquered land : the estates were not confiscated, and not absolutely sequestrated ; and, indeed, money coming from them had been sent to her for the education of her children. It lay in unopened official envelopes, piled one upon another, quarterly remittances, horrible as blood of slaughter in her sight. Count Serabiglione made a point of counting the packets always within the first five minutes of a visit to his daughter. He said nothing, but was careful to see to the proper working of the lock of the cupboard where the precious deposits were kept, and sometimes in forgetfulness he carried off the key. When his daughter reclaimed it, she observed, ' Pray believe me quite as anxious as yourself to preserve these documents.' And the count answered, ' They represent the estates, and are of legal value, though the amount is small. They represent your protest, and the admission of your claim. They are priceless.'

In some degree, also, they compensated him for the expense he was put to in providing for his daughter's subsistence and that of her children. For there, at all events, visible before his eyes, was the value of the money, if not the money expended. He remonstrated with Laura for leaving it more than necessarily exposed. She replied,

'My people know what that money means!' implying, of course, that no one in her house would consequently touch it. Yet it was reserved for the count to find it gone.

The discovery was made by the astounded nobleman on the day preceding Vittoria's appearance at La Scala. His daughter being absent, he had visited the cupboard merely to satisfy an habitual curiosity. The cupboard was open, and had evidently been ransacked. He rang up the domestics, and would have charged them all with having done violence to the key, but that on reflection he considered this to be a way of binding faggots together, and he resolved to take them one by one, like the threading Jesuit that he was, and so get a Judas. Laura's return saved him from much exercise of his peculiar skill. She, with a cool 'Ebbene!' asked him how long he had expected the money to remain there. Upon which, enraged, he accused her of devoting the money to the accursed patriotic cause. And here they came to a curious open division.

'Be content, my father,' she said; 'the money is my husband's, and is expended on his behalf.'

'You waste it among the people who were the cause of his ruin!' her father retorted.

'You presume me to have returned it to the Government, possibly?'

'I charge you with tossing it to your so-called patriots.'

'Sir, if I have done that, I have done well.'

'Hear her!' cried the count to the attentive ceiling; and addressing her with an ironical 'madame,' he begged permission to inquire of her whether haply *she* might be the person in the pay of Revolutionists who was about to appear at La Scala, under the name of the signorina Vittoria. 'For you are getting dramatic in your pose, my Laura,' he added, familiarizing the colder tone of his

irony. 'You are beginning to stand easily in attitudes of defiance to your own father.'

'That I may practise how to provoke a paternal Government, you mean,' she rejoined, and was quite a match for him in dialectics.

The count chanced to allude further to the signorina Vittoria.

'Do you know much of that lady?' she asked.

'As much as is known,' said he.

They looked at one another; the count thinking, 'I gave to this girl an excess of brains, in my folly!'

Compelled to drop his eyes, and vexed by the tacit defeat, he pursued, 'You expect great things from her?'

'Great,' said his daughter.

'Well, well,' he murmured acquiescingly, while sounding within himself for the part to play. 'Well—yes! she may do what you expect.'

'There is not the slightest doubt of her capacity,' said his daughter, in a tone of such perfect conviction that the count was immediately and irresistibly tempted to play the part of sagacious, kindly, tolerant but foreseeing father; and in this becoming character he exposed the risks her party ran in trusting anything of weight to a woman. Not that he decried women. Out of their sphere he did not trust them, and he simply objected to them when out of their sphere: the last four words being uttered staccato.

'But we trust her to do what she has undertaken to do,' said Laura.

The count brightened prodigiously from his suspicion to a certainty; and as he was still smiling at the egregious trap his clever but unskilled daughter had fallen into, he found himself listening incredulously to her plain additional sentence:—

'She has easy command of three octaves.'

By which the allusion was transformed from politics to Art. Had Laura reserved this cunning turn a little further, yielding to the natural temptation to increase the shock of the antithetical battery, she would have betrayed herself : but it came at the right moment : the count gave up his arms. He told her that this signorina Vittoria was suspected. ' Whom will they not suspect ! ' interjected Laura. He assured her that if a conspiracy had ripened it must fail. She was to believe that he abhorred the part of a spy or informer, but he was bound, since she was reckless, to watch over his daughter ; and also bound, that he might be of service to her, to earn by service to others as much power as he could reasonably hope to obtain. Laura signified that he argued excellently well. In a fit of unjustified doubt of her sincerity, he complained, with a querulous snap :—

' You have your own ideas ; you have your own ideas. You think me this and that. A man must be employed.'

' And this is to account for your occupation ? ' she remarked.

' Employed, I say ! ' the count reiterated fretfully. He was unmasking to no purpose, and felt himself as on a slope, having given his adversary vantage.

' So that there is no choice for you, do you mean ?

The count set up a staggering affirmative, but knocked it over with its natural enemy as soon as his daughter had said, ' Not being for Italy, you must necessarily be against her :—I admit that to be the position ! '

' No ! ' he cried ; ' no : there is no question of " for " or " against," as you are aware. " Italy, and not Revolution " : that is my motto.'

' Or, in other words, " The Impossible," ' said Laura. ' A perfect motto ! '

Again the count looked at her, with the remorseful thought : ' I certainly gave you too much brains.'

He smiled: 'If you could only believe it not impossible!'

'Do you really imagine that "Italy without Revolution" does not mean "Austria"?' she inquired.

She had discovered how much he, and therefore his party, suspected, and now she had reasons for wishing him away. Not daring to show symptoms of restlessness, she offered him the chance of recovering himself on the crutches of an explanation. He accepted the assistance, praising his wits for their sprightly divination, and went through a long-winded statement of his views for the welfare of Italy, quoting his favourite Berni frequently, and forcing the occasion for that jolly poet. Laura gave quiet attention to all, and when he was exhausted at the close, said meditatively, 'Yes. Well; you are older. It may seem to you that I shall think as you do when I have had a similar, or the same, length of experience.'

This provoking reply caused her father to jump up from his chair and spin round for his hat. She rose to speed him forth.

'It may seem to me!' he kept muttering. 'It may seem to me that when a daughter gets married—addio!—she is nothing but her husband.'

'Ay! ay! if it might be so!' the signora wailed out.

The count hated tears, considering them a clog to all useful machinery. He was departing, when through the open window a noise of scuffling in the street below arrested him.

'Has it commenced?' he said, starting.

'What?' asked the signora, coolly; and made him pause.

'But—but—but!' he answered, and had the grace to spare her ears. The thought in him was: 'But that I had some faith in my wife, and don't admire the devil

sufficiently, I would accuse him point-blank, for, by Bacchus ! you are as clever as he.'

It is a point in the education of parents that they should learn to apprehend humbly the compliment of being outwitted by their own offspring.

Count Serabiglione leaned out of the window and saw that his horses were safe and the coachman handy. There were two separate engagements going on between angry twisting couples.

'*Is* there a habitable town in Italy ? ' the count exclaimed frenziedly. First he called to his coachman to drive away, next to wait as if nailed to the spot. He cursed the revolutionary spirit as the mother of vices. While he was gazing at the fray, the door behind him opened, as he knew by the rush of cool air which struck his temples. He fancied that his daughter was hurrying off in obedience to a signal, and turned upon her just as Laura was motioning to a female figure in the doorway to retire.

'Who is this ? ' said the count.

A veil was over the strange lady's head. She was excited, and breathed quickly. The count brought forward a chair to her, and put on his best court manner. Laura caressed her, whispering, ere she replied : 'The signorina Vittoria Romana !—Biancolla !—Benarriva ! ' and numerous other names of inventive endearment. But the count was too sharp to be thrown off the scent. 'Aha ! ' he said, 'do I see her one evening before the term appointed ? ' and bowed profoundly. 'The signorina Vittoria ! '

She threw up her veil.

'Success is certain,' he remarked and applauded, holding one hand as a snuff-box for the fingers of the other to tap on.

'Signor Conte, you must not praise me before you have heard me.'

'To have seen you!'

'The voice has a wider dominion, signor Conte.

'The fame of the signorina's beauty will soon be far wider. Was Venus a cantatrice?'

She blushed, being unable to continue this sort of Mayfly-shooting dialogue, but her first charming readiness had affected the proficient social gentleman very pleasantly, and with fascinated eyes he hummed and buzzed about her like a moth at a lamp. Suddenly his head dived: 'Nothing, nothing, signorina,' he said, brushing delicately at her dress; 'I thought it might be paint.' He smiled to reassure her, and then he dived again, murmuring: 'It must be something sticking to the dress. Pardon me.' With that he went to the bell. 'I will ring up my daughter's maid. Or Laura—where is Laura?'

The signora Piaveni had walked to the window. This antiquated fussiness of the dilettante little nobleman was sickening to her.

'Probably you expect to discover a revolutionary symbol in the lines of the signorina's dress,' she said.

'A revolutionary symbol!—my dear! my dear!' The count reproved his daughter. 'Is not our signorina a pure artist, accomplishing easily three octaves? aha! Three!' and he rubbed his hands. 'But, three good octaves!' he addressed Vittoria seriously and admonishingly. 'It is a fortune—millions! It is precisely the very grandest heritage! It is an army!'

'I trust that it may be!' said Vittoria, with so deep and earnest a ring of her voice that the count himself, malicious as his ejaculations had been, was astonished. At that instant Laura cried from the window: 'These horses will go mad.'

The exclamation had the desired effect.

'Eh?—pardon me, signorina,' said the count, moving

half-way to the window, and then askant for his hat. The clatter of the horses' hoofs sent him dashing through the doorway, at which place his daughter stood with his hat extended. He thanked and blessed her for the kindly attention, and in terror lest the signorina should think evil of him as 'one of the generation of the hasty,' he said, 'Were it anything but horses! anything but horses! one's horses!—ha!' The audible hoofs called him off. He kissed the tips of his fingers, and tripped out.

The signora stepped rapidly to the window, and leaning there, cried a word to the coachman, who signalled perfect comprehension, and immediately the count's horses were on their hind-legs, chafing and pulling to right and left, and the street was tumultuous with them. She flung down the window, seized Vittoria's cheeks in her two hands, and pressed the head upon her bosom. 'He will not disturb us again,' she said, in quite a new tone, sliding her hands from the cheeks to the shoulders and along the arms to the fingers'-ends, which they clutched lovingly. 'He is of the old school, friend of my heart! and besides, he has but two pairs of horses, and one he keeps in Vienna. We live in the hope that our masters will pay us better! Tell me! you are in good health? All is well with you? Will they have to put paint on her soft cheeks to-morrow? Little, if they hold the colour as full as now? My Sandra! amica! should I have been jealous if Giacomo had known you? On my soul, I cannot guess! But, you love what he loved. He seems to live for me when they are talking of Italy, and you send your eyes forward as if you *saw* the country free. God help me! how I have been containing myself for the last hour and a half!'

The signora dropped in a seat and laughed a languid laugh.

'The little ones? I will ring for them. Assunta shall

bring them down in their night-gowns if they are undressed; and we will muffle the windows, for my little man will be wanting his song; and did you not promise him the great one which is to raise Italy—his mother, from the dead? Do you remember our little fellow's eyes as he tried to see the picture? I fear I force him too much, and there 's no need—not a bit.'

The time was exciting, and the signora spoke excitedly. Messina and Reggio were in arms. South Italy had given the open signal. It was near upon the hour of the unmasking of the great Lombard conspiracy, and Vittoria, standing there, was the beacon-light of it. Her presence filled Laura with transports of exultation; and shy of displaying it, and of the theme itself, she let her tongue run on, and satisfied herself by smoothing the hand of the brave girl on her chin, and plucking with little loving tugs at her skirts. In doing this she suddenly gave a cry, as if stung.

'You carry pins,' she said. And inspecting the skirts more closely, 'You have a careless maid in that creature Giacinta; she lets paper stick to your dress. What is this?'

Vittoria turned her head, and gathered up her dress to see.

'Pinned with the butterfly!' Laura spoke under her breath.

Vittoria asked what it meant.

'Nothing—nothing,' said her friend, and rose, pulling her eagerly toward the lamp.

A small bronze butterfly secured a square piece of paper with clipped corners to her dress. Two words were written on it:—

'Sei sospetta,'

CHAPTER XII

THE BRONZE BUTTERFLY

The two women were facing one another in a painful silence when Carlo Ammiani was announced to them. He entered with a rapid stride, and struck his hands together gladly at sight of Vittoria.

Laura met his salutation by lifting the accusing butterfly attached to Vittoria's dress.

'Yes; I expected it,' he said, breathing quick from recent exertion. 'They are kind—they give her a personal warning. Sometimes the dagger heads the butterfly. I have seen the mark on the Play-bills affixed to the signorina's name.'

'What does it mean?' said Laura, speaking huskily, with her head bent over the bronze insect. 'What can it mean?' she asked again, and looked up to meet a covert answer.

'Unpin it.' Vittoria raised her arms as if she felt the thing to be enveloping her.

The signora loosened the pin from its hold; but dreading lest she thereby sacrificed some possible clue to the mystery, she hesitated in her action, and sent an intolerable shiver of spite through Vittoria's frame, at whom she gazed in a cold and cruel way, saying, 'Don't tremble.' And again, 'Is it the doing of that *garritrice magrezza*, whom you call *la Lazzeruola*? Speak. Can you trace it to her hand? Who put the plague-mark upon you?'

Vittoria looked steadily away from her.

'It means just this,' Carlo interposed;—'there! now it 's off; and, signorina, I entreat you to think nothing of it,—it means that any one who takes a chief part in the

game we play, shall and must provoke all fools, knaves, and idiots to think and do their worst. They can't imagine a pure devotion. Yes, I see—"*Sei sospetta.*" They would write their *Sei sospetta* upon St. Catherine in the Wheel. Put it out of your mind. Pass it.'

'But they suspect her; and why do they suspect her?' Laura questioned vehemently. 'I ask, is it a Conservatorio rival, or the brand of one of the Clubs? She has no answer.'

'Observe.' Carlo laid the paper under her eyes. Three angles were clipped, the fourth was doubled under. He turned it back and disclosed the initials B. R. 'This also is the work of our man-devil, as I thought. I begin to think that we shall be eternally thwarted, until we first clear our Italy of its vermin. Here is a weazel, a snake, a tiger, in one. They call him the Great Cat. He fancies himself a patriot,—he is only a conspirator. I denounce him, but he gets the faith of people, our Agostino among them, I believe. The energy of this wretch is terrific. He has the vigour of a fasting saint. Myself—I declare it to you, signora, with shame, I know what it is to fear this man. He has Satanic blood, and the worst is, that the Chief trusts him.'

'Then, so do I,' said Laura.

'And I,' Vittoria echoed her.

A sudden squeeze beset her fingers. 'And I trust *you*,' Laura said to her. 'But there has been some indiscretion. My child, wait: give no heed to me, and have no feelings. Carlo, my friend—my husband's boy-brother-in-arms! let her teach you to be generous. She must have been indiscreet. Has she friends among the Austrians? I have one, and it is known, and I am not suspected. But, has she? What have you said or done that might cause them to suspect you? Speak, Sandra mia.'

It was difficult for Vittoria to speak upon the theme,

which made her appear as a criminal replying to a charge. At last she said, 'English : I have no foreign friends but English. I remember nothing that I have done.—Yes, I have said I thought I might tremble if I was led out to be shot.'

'Pish ! tush ! ' Laura checked her. 'They *flog* women, they do not shoot them. They shoot men.'

'That is our better fortune,' said Ammiani.

'But, Sandra, my sister,' Laura persisted now, in melodious coaxing tones. 'Can you not help us to guess ? I am troubled : I am stung. It is for your sake I feel it so. Can't you imagine who did it, for instance ? '

'No, signora, I cannot,' Vittoria replied.

'You can't guess ? '

'I cannot help you.'

'You will not ! ' said the irritable woman. 'Have you noticed no one passing near you ? '

'A woman brushed by me as I entered this street. I remember no one else. And my Beppo seized a man who was spying on me, as he said. That is all I can remember.'

Vittoria turned her face to Ammiani.

'Barto Rizzo has lived in England,' he remarked, half to himself. 'Did you come across a man called Barto Rizzo there, signorina ? I suspect him to be the author of this.'

At the name of Barto Rizzo, Laura's eyes widened, awakening a memory in Ammiani ; and her face had a spectral wanness.

'I must go to my chamber,' she said. 'Talk of it together. I will be with you soon.'

She left them.

Ammiani bent over to Vittoria's ear. 'It was this man who sent the warning to Giacomo, the signora's husband, which he despised, and which would have saved him.

It is the only good thing I know of Barto Rizzo. Pardon her.'

'I do,' said the girl, now weeping.

'She has evidently a rooted superstitious faith in these revolutionary sign-marks. They are contagious to her. She loves you, and believes in you, and will kneel to you for forgiveness by-and-by. Her misery is a disease. She thinks now, "If my husband had given heed to the warning!"'

'Yes, I see how her heart works,' said Vittoria. 'You knew her husband, signor Carlo?'

'I knew him. I served under him. He was the brother of my love. I shall have no other.'

Vittoria placed her hand for Ammiani to take it. He joined his own to the fevered touch. The heart of the young man swelled most ungovernably, but the perils of the morrow were imaged by him, circling her as with a tragic flame, and he had no word for his passion.

The door opened, when a noble little boy bounded into the room, followed by a little girl in pink and white, like a streamer in the steps of her brother. With shouts, and with arms thrown forward, they flung themselves upon Vittoria, the boy claiming all her lap, and the girl struggling for a share of the kingdom. Vittoria kissed them, crying, 'No, no, no, Messer Jack, this is a republic, and not an empire, and you are to have no rights of "first come"; and Amalia sits on one knee, and you on one knee, and you sit face to face, and take hands, and swear to be satisfied.'

'Then I desire not to be called an English Christian name, and you will call me Giacomo,' said the boy

Vittoria sang, in mountain-notes, 'Giacomo!—Giacomo—Giac-giac-giac . . . como!'

The children listened, glistening up at her, and in conjunction jumped and shouted for more.

'More?' said Vittoria; 'but is the signor Carlo no friend of ours? and does he wear a magic ring that makes him invisible?'

'Let the German girl go to him,' said Giacomo, and strained his throat to reach at kisses.

'I am not a German girl,' little Amalia protested, refusing to go to Carlo Ammiani under that stigma, though a delightful haven of open arms and knees, and filliping fingers, invited her.

'She is not a German girl, O signor Giacomo,' said Vittoria, in the theatrical manner.

'She has a German name.'

'It 's not a German name!' the little girl shrieked.

Giacomo set Amalia to a miauling tune.

'So, you hate the Duchess of Graätli!' said Vittoria. 'Very well. I shall remember.'

The boy declared that he did not hate his mother's friend and sister's godmother: he rather liked her, he really liked her, he loved her; but he loathed the name 'Amalia,' and could not understand why the duchess would be a German. He concluded by miauling 'Amalia' in the triumph of contempt.

'Cat, begone!' said Vittoria, promptly setting him down on his feet, and little Amalia at the same time perceiving that practical sympathy only required a ring at the bell for it to come out, straightway pulled the wires within herself, and emitted a doleful wail that gave her sole possession of Vittoria's bosom, where she was allowed to bring her tears to an end very comfortingly. Giacomo meanwhile, his body bent in an arch, plucked at Carlo Ammiani's wrists with savagely playful tugs, and took a stout boy's lesson in the art of despising what he coveted. He had only to ask for pardon. Finding it necessary, he came shyly up to Vittoria, who put Amalia in his way, kissing whom, he was himself tenderly kissed.

'But girls should not cry!' Vittoria reproved the little woman.

'Why do you cry?' asked Amalia simply.

'See! she has been crying.' Giacomo appropriated the discovery, perforce of loudness, after the fashion of his sex.

'Why does our Vittoria cry?' both the children clamoured.

'Because your mother is such a cruel sister to her,' said Laura, passing up to them from the doorway. She drew Vittoria's head against her breast, looked into her eyes, and sat down among them. Vittoria sang one low-toned soft song, like the voice of evening, before they were dismissed to their beds. She could not obey Giacomo's demand for a martial air, and had to plead that she was tired.

When the children had gone, it was as if a truce had ended. The signora and Ammiani fell to a brisk counterchange of questions relating to the mysterious suspicion which had fallen upon Vittoria. Despite Laura's love for her, she betrayed her invincible feeling that there must be some grounds for special or temporary distrust.

'The lives that hang on it knock at me here,' she said, touching under her throat with fingers set like falling arrows.

But Ammiani, who moved in the centre of conspiracies, met at their councils, and knew their heads, and frequently combated their schemes, was not possessed by the same profound idea of their potential command of hidden facts and sovereign wisdom. He said, 'We trust too much to one man. We are compelled to trust him, but we trust too much *to* him. I mean this man, this devil, Barto Rizzo. Signora, signora, he must be spoken of. He has dislocated the plot. He is the fanatic of the revolution, and we are trusting him as if he had full sway of

reason. What is the consequence ? The Chief is absent : he is now, as I believe, in Genoa. All the plan for the rising is accurate ; the instruments are ready, and we are paralyzed. I have been to three houses to-night, and where, two hours previously, there was union and concert, all are irresolute and divided. I have hurried off a messenger to the Chief. Until we hear from him, nothing can be done. I left Ugo Corte storming against us Milanese, threatening, as usual, to work without us, and have a Bergamasc and Brescian Republic of his own. Count Medole is for a week's postponement. Agostino smiles and chuckles, and talks his poetisms.'

'Until you hear from the Chief, nothing is to be done ?' Laura said passionately. 'Are we to remain in suspense ? Impossible ! I cannot bear it. We have plenty of arms in the city. Oh, that we had cannon ! I worship cannon ! They are the Gods of battle ! But if we surprise the citadel ;—one true shock of alarm makes a mob of an army. I have heard my husband say so. Let there be no delay. That is my word.'

'But, signora, do you see that all concert about the signal is lost ?'

'My friend, I see something' ; Laura nodded a significant half-meaning at him. 'And perhaps it will be as well. Go at once. See that another signal is decided upon. Oh ! because we are ready—ready. Inaction now is uttermost anguish—kills the heart. What number of the white butchers have we in the city to-night ?'

'They are marching in at every gate. I saw a regiment of Hungarians coming up the Borgo della Stella. Two fresh squadrons of Uhlans in the Corso Francesco. In the Piazza d'Armi artillery is encamped.'

'The better for Brescia, for Bergamo, for Padua, for Venice !' exclaimed Laura. 'There is a limit to their power. We Milanese can match them. For days and

days I have had a dream lying in my bosom that Milan was soon to breathe. Go, my brother; go to Barto Rizzo; gather him and Count Medole, Agostino, and Colonel Corte—to whom I kiss my fingers—gather them together, and squeeze their brains for the one spark of divine fire in this darkness which must exist where there are so many thorough men bent upon a sacred enterprise. And, Carlo,'—Laura checked her nervous voice,—'don't think I am declaiming to you from one of my "Midnight Lamps."' (She spoke of the title of her pamphlets to the Italian people.) 'You feel among us women very much as Agostino and Colonel Corte feel when the boy Carlo airs his impetuosities in their presence. Yes, my fervour makes a philosopher of you. That is human nature. Pity me, pardon me, and do my bidding.'

The comparison of Ammiani's present sentiments to those of the elders of the conspiracy, when his mouth was open in their midst, was severe and masterful, for the young man rose instantly without a thought in his head.

He remarked: 'I will tell them that the signorina does not give the signal.'

'Tell them that the name she has chosen shall be Vittoria still; but say, that she feels a shadow of suspicion to be an injunction upon her at such a crisis, and she will serve silently and humbly until she is rightly known, and her time comes. She is willing to appear before them, and submit to interrogation. She knows her innocence, and knowing that they work for the good of the country, she, if it is their will, is content to be blotted out of all participation:—all! She abjures all for the common welfare. Say that. And say, to-morrow night the rising must be. Oh! to-morrow night! It is my husband to me.'

Laura Piaveni crossed her arms upon her bosom.

Ammiani was moving from them with a downward face, when a bell-note of Vittoria's voice arrested him.

'Stay, signor Carlo ; I shall sing to-morrow night.'

The widow heard her through that thick emotion which had just closed her speech with its symbolical sensuous rapture. Divining opposition fiercely, like a creature thwarted when athirst for the wells, she gave her a terrible look, and then said cajolingly, as far as absence of sweetness could make the tones pleasant, 'Yes, you will sing, but you will not sing that song.'

'It is that song which I intend to sing, signora.'

'When it is interdicted ? '

'There is only one whose interdict I can acknowledge.'

'You will dare to sing in defiance of me ? '

'I dare nothing when I simply do my duty.'

Ammiani went up to the window, and leaned there, eyeing the lights leading down to the crowding Piazza. He wished that he were among the crowd, and might not hear those sharp stinging utterances coming from Laura, and Vittoria's unwavering replies, less frequent, but firmer, and gravely solid. Laura spent her energy in taunts, but Vittoria spoke only of her resolve, and to the point. It was, as his military instincts framed the simile, like the venomous crackling of skirmishing rifles before a fortress, that answered slowly with its volume of sound and sweeping shot. He had the vision of himself pleading to secure her safety, and in her hearing, on the Motterone, where she had seemed so simple a damsel, albeit nobly enthusiastic : too fair, too gentle to be stationed in any corner of the conflict at hand. Partly abased by the remembrance of his brainless intercessions then, and of the laughter which had greeted them, and which the signora had recently recalled, it was nevertheless not all in self-abasement (as the momentary recognition of a splendid character is commonly with

men) that he perceived the stature of Vittoria's soul. Remembering also what the Chief had spoken of women, Ammiani thought 'Perhaps he has known one such as she.' The passion of the young man's heart magnified her image. He did not wonder to see the signora acknowledge herself worsted in the conflict.

'She talks like the edge of a sword,' cried Laura, desperately, and dropped into a chair. 'Take her home, and convince her, if you can, on the way, Carlo. I go to the Duchess of Graätli to-night. She has a reception. Take this girl home. She says she *will* sing: she obeys the Chief, and none but the Chief. We will not suppose that it is her desire to shine. She is suspected; she is accused; she is branded; there is no general faith in her; yet she *will* hold the torch to-morrow night:—and what ensues? Some will move, some turn back, some run headlong over to treachery, some hang irresolute: all are for the shambles! The blood is on her head.'

'I will excuse myself to you another time,' said Vittoria. 'I love you, signora Laura.'

'You do, you do, or you would not think of excusing yourself to me,' said Laura. 'But now, go. You have cut me in two. Carlo Ammiani may succeed where I have failed, and I have used every weapon; enough to make a mean creature hate me for life and kiss me with transports. Do your best, Carlo, and let it be your utmost.'

It remained for Ammiani to assure her that their views were different.

'The signorina persists in her determination to carry out the programme indicated by the Chief, and refuses to be diverted from her path by the false suspicions of subordinates.' He employed a sententious phraseology instinctively, as men do when they are nervous, as well as when they justify the cynic's definition of the uses of speech. 'The signorina is, in my opinion, right. If she draws

back, she publicly accepts the blot upon her name. I speak against my own feelings and my wishes.'

'Sandra, do you hear?' exclaimed Laura. 'This is a friend's interpretation of your inconsiderate wilfulness.'

Vittoria was content to reply, 'The signor Carlo judges of me differently.'

'Go, then, and be fortified by him in this headstrong folly.' Laura motioned her hand, and laid it on her face.

Vittoria knelt and enclosed her with her arms, kissing her knees.

'Beppo waits for me at the house-door,' she said; but Carlo chose not to hear of this shadow-like Beppo.

'You have nothing to say for her save that she clears her name by giving the signal,' Laura burst out on his temperate 'Addio,' and started to her feet. 'Well, let it be so. Fruitless blood again! *A rivederla* to you both. To-night I am in the enemy's camp. They play with open cards. Amalia tells me all she knows by what she disguises. I may learn something. Come to me to-morrow. My Sandra, I will kiss you. These shudderings of mine have no meaning.'

The signora embraced her, and took Ammiani's salute upon her fingers.

'Sour fingers!' he said. She leaned her cheek to him, whispering, 'I could easily be persuaded to betray you.'

He answered, 'I must have some merit in not betraying myself.'

'At each elbow!' she laughed. 'You show the thumps of an electric battery at each elbow, and expect your Goddess of lightnings not to see that she moves you. Go. You have not sided with me, and I am right, and I am a woman. By the way, Sandra mia, I would beg the loan of your Beppo for two hours or less.'

Vittoria placed Beppo at her disposal.

'And you run home to bed,' continued Laura. 'Reason comes to you obstinate people when you are left alone for a time in the dark.'

She hardly listened to Vittoria's statement that the chief singers in the new opera were engaged to attend a meeting at eleven at night at the house of the maestro Rocco Ricci.

CHAPTER XIII

THE PLOT OF THE SIGNOR ANTONIO

THERE was no concealment as to Laura's object in making request for the services of Beppo. She herself knew it to be obvious that she intended to probe and cross-examine the man, and in her wilfulness she chose to be obtuse to opinion. She did not even blush to lean a secret ear above the stairs that she might judge, by the tones of Vittoria's voice upon her giving Beppo the order to wait, whether she was at the same time conveying a hint for guardedness. But Vittoria said not a word: it was Ammiani who gave the order. 'I am despicable in distrusting her for a single second,' said Laura. That did not the less encourage her to question Beppo rigorously forthwith; and as she was not to be deceived by an Italian's affectation of simplicity, she let him answer two or three times like a plain fool, and then abruptly accused him of standing prepared with these answers. Beppo, within his own bosom, immediately ascribed to his sagacious instinct the mere spirit of opposition and dislike to serve any one save his own young mistress which had caused him to irritate the signora and be on his guard. He proffered a candid admission of the truth

of the charge ; adding, that he stood likewise prepared with an unlimited number of statements. ' Questions, illustrious signora, invariably put me on the defensive, and seem to cry for a return thrust ; and this I account for by the fact that my mother—the blessed little woman now among the Saints !—was questioned, brows and heels, by a ferruginously-faced old judge at the momentous period when she carried me. So that, a question—and I show point ; but ask me for a statement, and, ah, signora ! ' Beppo delivered a sweep of the arm, as to indicate the spontaneous flow of his tongue.

' I think,' said Laura, ' you have been a soldier, and a serving-man.'

' And a scene-shifter, most noble signora, at La Scala.'

' You accompanied the signor Mertyrio to England when he was wounded ? '

' I did.'

' And there you beheld the signorina Vittoria, who was then bearing the name of Emilia Belloni ? '

' Which name she changed on her arrival in Italy, illustrious signora, for that of Vittoria Campa—" *sull' campo della gloria* "—ah ! ah !—her own name being an attraction to the blow-flies in her own country. All this is true.'

' It should be a comfort to you ! The Signor Mertyrio . . .'

Beppo writhed his person at the continuance of the questionings, and obtaining a pause, he rushed into his statement : ' The signor Mertyrio was well, and on the point of visiting Italy, and quitting the wave-embraced island of fog, of beer, of moist winds, and much money, and much kindness, where great hearts grew. The signorina corresponded with him, and with him only. '

' You know that, and will swear to it ? ' Laura exclaimed.

Beppo thereby receiving the cue he had commenced beating for, swore to its truth profoundly, and straightway directed his statement to prove that his mistress had not been politically (or amorously, if the suspicion aimed at her in those softer regions) indiscreet or blameable in any of her actions. The signorina, he said, never went out from her abode without the companionship of her meritorious mother and his own most humble attendance. He, Beppo, had a master and a mistress, the signor Mertyrio and the signorina Vittoria. She saw no foreigners: though—a curious thing!—he had seen her when the English language was talked in her neighbourhood; and she had a love for that language: it made her face play in smiles like an infant's after it has had suck and is full;—the sort of look you perceive when one is dreaming and hears music. She did not speak to foreigners. She did not care to go to foreign cities, but loved Milan, and lived in it free and happy as an earwig in a ripe apricot. The circumvallation of Milan gave her elbow-room enough, owing to the absence of forts all round—'which knock one's funny-bone in Verona, signora.' Beppo presented a pure smile upon a simple bow for acceptance. 'The air of Milan,' he went on, with less confidence under Laura's steady gaze, and therefore more forcing of his candour—'the sweet air of Milan gave her a deep chestful, so that she could hold her note as long as five lengths of a fiddle-bow:—by the body of Sant' Ambrogio, it was true!' Beppo stretched out his arm, and chopped his hand edgeways five testificatory times on the shoulder-ridge. 'Ay, a hawk might fly from St. Luke's head (on the Duomo) to the stone on San Primo over Como, while the signorina held on her note! You listened, you gasped—you thought of a poet in his dungeon, and suddenly, behold, his chains are struck off!—you thought of a gold-shelled tortoise making his

pilgrimage to a beatific shrine !—you thought—you knew not what you thought ! '

Here Beppo sank into a short silence of ecstasy, and wakening from it, as with an ardent liveliness : ' The signora has heard her sing ? How to describe it ! To-morrow night will be a feast for Milan.'

' You think that the dilettanti of Milan will have a delight to-morrow night ? ' said Laura ; but seeing that the man's keen ear had caught note of the ironic reptile under the flower, and unwilling to lose further time, she interdicted his reply.

' Beppo, my good friend, you are a complete Italian—you waste your cleverness. You will gratify me by remembering that I am your countrywoman. I have already done you a similar favour by allowing you to air your utmost ingenuity. The reflection that it has been to no purpose will neither scare you nor instruct you. Of that I am quite assured. I speak solely to suit the present occasion. Now, don't seek to elude me. If you are a snake with friends as well as enemies, you are nothing but a snake. I ask you—you are not compelled to answer, but I forbid you to lie—has your mistress seen, or conversed and had correspondence with any one receiving the Tedeschi's gold, man or woman ? Can any one, man or woman, call her a traitress ? '

' Not twice ! ' thundered Beppo, with a furrowed red forehead.

There was a noble look about the fellow as he stood with stiff legs in a posture, frowning—theatrical, but noble also ; partly the look of a Figaro defending his honour in extremity, yet much like a statue of a French Marshal of the Empire.

' That will do,' said Laura, rising. She was about to leave him, when the Duchess of Graätli's chasseur was

ushered in, bearing a missive from Amalia, her friend. She opened it and read :—

'BEST BELOVED,—Am I soon to be reminded bitterly that there is a river of steel between my heart and me ?

'Fail not in coming to-night. Your new Bulbul is in danger. The silly thing must have been reading Roman history. Say not no ! It intoxicates you all. I watch over her for my Laura's sake : a thousand kisses I shower on you, dark delicious soul that you are ! Are you not my pine-grove leading to the evening star ? Come, that we may consult how to spirit her away during her season of peril. Gulfs do not close over little female madcaps, my Laura ; so we must not let her take the leap. Enter the salle when you arrive : pass down it once and return upon your steps ; then to my boudoir. My maid Aennchen will conduct you. Addio. Tell this messenger that you come. Laura mine, I am for ever thy

'AMALIA.'

Laura signalled to the chasseur that her answer was affirmative. As he was retiring, his black-plumed hat struck against Beppo, who thrust him aside and gave the hat a dexterous kick, all the while keeping a decorous front toward the signora. She stood meditating. The enraged chasseur mumbled a word or two for Beppo's ear, in execrable Italian, and went. Beppo then commenced bowing half toward the doorway, and tried to shoot through, out of sight and away, in a final droop of excessive servility, but the signora stopped him, telling him to consider himself her servant until the morning : at which he manifested a surprising readiness, indicative of nothing short of personal devotion, and remained for two minutes after she had quitted the room. So much time having elapsed, he ran bounding down the stairs

and found the hall-door locked, and that he was a prisoner during the signora's pleasure. The discovery that he was mastered by superior cunning, instead of disconcerting, quieted him wonderfully ; so he put by the resources of his ingenuity for the next opportunity, and returned stealthily to his starting-point, where the signora found him awaiting her with composure. The man was in mortal terror lest he might be held guilty of a trust betrayed, in leaving his mistress for an hour, even in obedience to her command, at this crisis : but it was not in his nature to state the case openly to the signora, whom he knew to be his mistress's friend, or to think of practising other than shrewd evasion to accomplish his duty and satisfy his conscience.

Laura said, without smiling, 'The street-door opens with a key,' and she placed the key in his hand, also her fan to carry. Once out of the house, she was sure that he would not forsake his immediate charge of the fan : she walked on, heavily veiled, confident of his following. The Duchess of Graätli's house neighboured the Corso Francesco ; numerous carriages were disburdening their freights of fair guests, and now and then an Austrian officer in full uniform ran up the steps, glittering under the lamps. 'I go in among them,' thought Laura. It rejoiced her that she had come on foot. Forgetting Beppo, and her black fan, as no Italian woman would have done but she who paced in an acute quivering of the anguish of hopeless remembrances and hopeless thirst of vengeance, she suffered herself to be conducted in the midst of the guests, and shuddered like one who has taken a fever-chill as she fulfilled the duchess's directions ; she passed down the length of the saloon, through a light of visages that were not human to her sensations.

Meantime Beppo, oppressed by his custody of the fan, and expecting that most serviceable lady's instrument to

be sent for at any minute, stood among a strange body of semi-feudal retainers below, where he was soon singled out by the duchess's chasseur, a Styrian, who, masking his fury under jest, in the South-German manner, endeavoured to lead him up to an altercation. But Beppo was much too supple to be entrapped. He apologized for any possible offences that he might have committed, assuring the chasseur that he considered one hat as good as another, and some hats better than others : in proof of extreme cordiality, he accepted the task of repeating the chasseur's name, which was 'Jacob Baumwalder Feckelwitz,' a tolerable mouthful for an Italian ; and it was with remarkable delicacy that Beppo contrived to take upon himself the whole ridicule of his vile pronunciation of the unwieldy name. Jacob Baumwalder Feckelwitz offered him beer to refresh him after the effort. While Beppo was drinking, he seized the fan. 'Good ; good ; a thousand thanks,' said Beppo, relinquishing it ; 'convey it aloft, I beseech you.' He displayed such alacrity and lightness of limb at getting rid of it, that Jacob thrust it between the buttons of his shirt-front, returning it to his possession by that aperture. Beppo's head sank. A handful of black lace and cedar-wood chained him to the spot ! He entreated the men in livery to take the fan upstairs and deliver it to the signora Laura Piaveni ; but they, being advised by Jacob, refused. 'Go yourself,' said Jacob, laughing, and little prepared to see the victim, on whom he thought that for another hour at least he had got his great paw firmly, take him at his word. Beppo sprang into the hall and up the stairs. The duchess's maid, ivory-faced Aennchen, was flying past him. She saw a very taking dark countenance making eyes at her, leaned her ear shyly, and pretending to understand all that was said by the rapid foreign tongue, acted from the suggestion of the sole

thing which she did understand. Beppo had mentioned the name of the signora Piaveni. 'This way,' she indicated with her finger, supposing that of course he wanted to see the signora very urgently.

Beppo tried hard to get her to carry the fan; but she lifted her fingers in a perfect Susannah horror of it, though still bidding him to follow. Naturally she did not go fast through the dark passages, where the game of the fan was once more played out, and with accompaniments. The accompaniments she objected to no further than a fish is agitated in escaping from the hook; but 'Nein, nein!' in her own language, and 'No, no!' in his, burst from her lips whenever he attempted to transfer the fan to her keeping. 'These white women are most wonderful!' thought Beppo, ready to stagger between perplexity and impatience.

'There; in there!' said Aennchen, pointing to a light that came through the folds of a curtain. Beppo kissed her fingers as they tugged unreluctantly in his clutch, and knew by a little pause that the case was hopeful for higher privileges. What to do? He had not an instant to spare; yet he dared not offend a woman's vanity. He gave an ecstatic pressure of her hand upon his breastbone, to let her be sure she was adored, albeit not embraced. After this act of prudence he went toward the curtain, while the fair Austrian soubrette flew on her previous errand.

It was enough that Beppo found himself in a dark antechamber for him to be instantly scrupulous in his footing and breathing. As he touched the curtain, a door opened on the other side of the interior, and a tender gabble of fresh feminine voices broke the stillness and ran on like a brook coming from leaps to a level, and again leaping and making noise of joy. The Duchess of Graätli had clasped the signora Laura's two hands and drawn her to

an ottoman, and between kissings and warmer claspings, was questioning of the little ones, Giacomo and her god-daughter Amalia.

'When, when did I see you last?' she exclaimed. 'Oh! not since we met that morning to lay our immortelles upon *his* tomb. My soul's sister! kiss me, remembering it. I saw you in the gateway—it seemed to me, as in a vision, that we had both had one warning to come for him, and knock, and the door would be opened, and our beloved would come forth! That was many days back. It is to me like a day locked up for ever in a casket of pearl. Was it not an unstained morning, my own! If I weep, it is with pleasure. But,' she added with precipitation, 'weeping of any kind will not do for these eyelids of mine.' And drawing forth a tiny gold-framed pocket-mirror she perceived convincingly that it would not do.

'They will think it is for the absence of my husband,' she said, as only a woman can say it who deplores nothing so little as that.

'When does he return from Vienna?' Laura inquired in the fallen voice of her thoughtfulness.

'I receive two couriers a week; I know not any more, my Laura. I believe he is pushing some connubial complaint against me at the Court. We have been married seventeen months. I submitted to the marriage because I could get no proper freedom without, and now I am expected to abstain from the very thing I sacrificed myself to get! Can he hear that in Vienna?' She snapped her fingers. 'If not, let him come and behold it in Milan. Besides, he is harmless. The Archduchess is all ears for the very man of whom he is jealous. This is my reply: You told me to marry: I obeyed. My heart 's in the earth, and I must have distractions. My present distraction is De Pyrmont, a good Catholic and a good

Austrian soldier, though a Frenchman. I grieve to say —it 's horrible—that it sometimes tickles me when I reflect that De Pyrmont is keen with the sword. But remember, Laura, it was not until after our marriage my husband told me he could have saved Giacomo by the lifting of a finger. Away with the man !—if it amuses me to punish him, I do so.'

The duchess kissed Laura's cheek, and continued :—

'Now to the point where we stand enemies ! I am for Austria, you are for Italy. Good. But I am always for Laura. So, there 's a river between us and a bridge across it. My darling, do you know that we are much too strong for you, if you mean anything serious to-morrow night ? '

'Are you ? ' Laura said calmly.

'I know, you see, that something is meant to happen to-morrow night.'

Laura said, 'Do you ? '

'We have positive evidence of it. More than that : Your Vittoria—but do you care to have her warned ? She will certainly find herself in a pitfall if she insists on carrying out her design. Tell me, *do* you care to have her warned and shielded ? A year of fortress-life is not agreeable, is not beneficial for the voice. Speak, my Laura.'

Laura looked up in the face of her friend mildly with her large dark eyes, replying, 'Do you think of sending Major de Pyrmont to her to warn her ? '

'Are you not wicked ? ' cried the duchess, feeling that she blushed, and that Laura had thrown her off the straight road of her interrogation. 'But, play cards with open hands, my darling, to-night. Look :—She is in danger. I know it ; so do you. She will be imprisoned perhaps before she steps on the boards—who knows ? Now. I—are not my very dreams all sworn in a regiment

to serve my Laura ?—I have a scheme. Truth, it is hardly mine. It belongs to the Greek, the signor Antonio-Pericles Agriolopoulos. It is simply '—the duchess dropped her voice out of Beppo's hearing—' a scheme to rescue her : speed her away to my chateau near Meran in Tyrol.' ' Tyrol ' was heard by Beppo. In his frenzy at the loss of the context he indulged in a yawn, and a grimace, and a dance of disgust all in one ; which lost him the next sentence likewise. ' There we purpose keeping her till all is quiet and her revolutionary fever has passed. Have you heard of this signor Antonio ? He could buy up the kingdom of Greece, all Tyrol, half Lombardy. The man has a passion for your Vittoria ; for her voice solely, I believe. He is considered, no doubt truly, a great connoisseur. He could have a passion for nothing else, or alas ! ' (the duchess shook her head with doleful drollery) ' would he insist on written securities and mortgages of my private property when he lends me money ? How different the world is from the romances, my Laura ! But for De Pyrmont, I might fancy my smile was really incapable of ransoming an empire ; I mean an emperor. Speak ; the man is waiting to come ; shall I summon him ? '

Laura gave an acquiescent nod.

By this time Beppo had taken root to the floor. ' I am in the best place after all,' he said, thinking of the duties of his service. He was perfectly well acquainted with the features of the signor Antonio. He knew that Luigi was the signor Antonio's spy upon Vittoria, and that no personal harm was intended toward his mistress ; but Beppo's heart was in the revolt of which Vittoria was to give the signal ; so, without a touch of animosity, determined to thwart him, Beppo waited to hear the signor Antonio's scheme.

The Greek was introduced by Aennchen. She glanced

at the signora's lap, and seeing her still without her fan, her eye shot slyly up with her shining temple, inspecting the narrow opening in the curtain furtively. A short hush of preluding ceremonies passed.

Presently Beppo heard them speaking; he was aghast to find that he had no comprehension of what they were uttering. 'Oh, accursed French dialect!' he groaned; discovering the talk to be in that tongue. The signor Antonio warmed rapidly from the frigid politeness of his introductory manner. A consummate acquaintance with French was required to understand him. He held out the fingers of one hand in regimental order, and with the others, which alternately screwed his moustache from its constitutional droop over the corners of his mouth, he touched the uplifted digits one by one, buzzing over them, flashing his white eyes, and shrugging in a way sufficient to madden a surreptitious listener who was aware that a wealth of meaning escaped him and mocked at him. At times the signor Antonio pitched a note compounded half of cursing, half of crying, it seemed: both pathetic and objurgative, as if he whimpered anathemas and had inexpressible bitter things in his mind. But there was a remedy! He displayed the specific on a third finger. It was there. This being done (number three on the fingers), matters might still be well. So much his electric French and gesticulations plainly asserted. Beppo strained all his attention for names, in despair at the riddle of the signs. Names were pillars of light in the dark unintelligible waste. The signora put a question. It was replied to with the name of the Maestro Rocco Ricci. Following that, the signor Antonio accompanied his voluble delivery with pantomimic action which seemed to indicate the shutting of a door and an instantaneous galloping of horses—a flight into air, anywhither. He whipped the visionary steeds with enthusi-

astic glee, and appeared to be off skyward like a mad poet, when the signora again put a question, and at once he struck his hand flat across his mouth, and sat postured to answer what she pleased with a glare of polite vexation. She spoke ; he echoed her, and the duchess took up the same phrase. Beppo was assisted by the triangular recurrence of the words and their partial relationship to Italian to interpret them : ' This night.' Then the signora questioned further. The Greek replied : ' Mademoiselle Irma di Karski.'

' La Lazzeruola,' she said.

The signor Antonio flashed a bit of sarcastic mimicry, as if acquiescing in the justice of the opprobrious term from the high point of view : but mademoiselle might pass,—she was good enough for the public.

Beppo heard and saw no more. A tug from behind recalled him to his situation. He put out his arms and gathered Aennchen all dark in them : and first kissing her so heartily as to set her trembling on the verge of a betrayal, before she could collect her wits he struck the fan down the pretty hollow of her back, between her shoulder-blades, and bounded away. It was not his intention to rush into the embrace of Jacob Baumwalder Feckelwitz, but that perambulating chasseur received him in a semi-darkness where all were shadows, and exclaimed, ' Aennchen ! ' Beppo gave an endearing tenderness to the few words of German known to him : ' *Gott—schaf—donner—dummer* ! ' and slipped from the hold of the astonished Jacob, sheer under his arm-pit. He was soon in the street, excited he knew not by what, or for what object. He shuffled the names he remembered to have just heard—' Rocco Ricci,' and ' la Lazzeruola.' Why did the name of la Lazzeruola come in advance of la Vittoria ? And what was the thing meant by ' this night,' which all three had uttered as in an agreement ?—ay !

and the Tyrol! The Tyrol—this night—Rocco Ricci—la Lazzeruola!

Beppo's legs were carrying him toward the house of the maestro Rocco Ricci ere he had arrived at any mental decision upon these imminent mysteries.

CHAPTER XIV

AT THE MAESTRO'S DOOR

The house of the maestro Rocco Ricci turned off the Borgo della Stella. Carlo Ammiani conducted Vittoria to the maestro's door. They conversed very little on the way.

'You are a good swordsman?' she asked him abruptly.

'I have as much skill as belongs to a perfect intimacy with the weapon,' he answered.

'Your father was a soldier, signor Carlo.'

'He was a General officer in what he believed to be the army of Italy. We used to fence together every day for two hours.'

'I love the fathers who do that,' said Vittoria.

After such speaking Ammiani was not capable of the attempt to preach peace and safety to her. He postponed it to the next minute and the next.

Vittoria's spirit was in one of those angry knots which are half of the intellect, half of the will, and are much under the domination of one or other of the passions in the ascendant. She was resolved to go forward; she felt justified in going forward; but the divine afflatus of enthusiasm buoyed her no longer, and she required the support of all that accuracy of insight and that senseless stubbornness which there might be in her nature. The

feeling that it was she to whom it was given to lift the torch and plant the standard of Italy, had swept her as through the strings of a harp. Laura, and the horrible little bronze butterfly, and the '*Sei sospetta*,' now made her duty seem dry and miserably fleshless, imaging itself to her as if a skeleton had been told to arise and walk: —say, the thing obeys, and fills a ghastly distension of men's eyelids for a space, and again lies down, and men get their breath: but who is the rosier for it? where is the glory of it? what is the good? This Milan, and Verona, Padua, Vicenza, Brescia, Venice, Florence, the whole Venetian, Tuscan, and Lombardic lands, down to far Sicily, and that Rome which always lay under the crown of a dead sunset in her idea—they too might rise; but she thought of them as skeletons likewise. Even the shadowy vision of Italy Free had no bloom on it, and stood fronting the blown trumpets of resurrection Lazarus-like.

At these moments young hearts, though full of sap and fire, cannot do common nursing labour for the little suckling sentiments and hopes, the dreams, the languors and the energies hanging about them for nourishment. Vittoria's horizon was within five feet of her. She saw neither splendid earth nor ancient heaven; nothing save a breach to be stepped over in defiance of foes and (what was harder to brave) of friends. Some wayward activity of old associations set her humming a quaint English tune, by which she was brought to her consciousness.

'Dear friend,' she said, becoming aware that there might be a more troubled depth in Ammiani's absence of speech than in her own.

'Yes?' said he, quickly, as for a sentence to follow. None came, and he continued, 'The signora Laura is also your friend.'

She rejoined coldly, 'I am not thinking of her.'

Vittoria had tried to utter what might be a word of comfort for him, and she found she had not a thought or an emotion. Here she differed from Laura, who, if the mood to heal a favourite's little sore at any season came upon her, would shower out lively tendernesses and all cajoleries possible to the tongue of woman. Yet the irritation of action narrowed Laura more than it did Vittoria; fevered her and distracted her sympathies. Being herself a plaything at the time, she could easily play a part for others. Vittoria had not grown, probably never would grow, to be so plastic off the stage. She was stringing her hand to strike a blow as men strike, and women when they do that cannot be quite feminine.

'How dull the streets are,' she remarked.

'They are, just now,' said Ammiani, thinking of them on the night to come convulsed with strife, and of her, tossed perhaps like a weed along the torrent of bloody deluge waters. Her step was so firm, her face so assured, that he could not fancy she realized any prospect of the sort, and it filled him with pity and a wretched quailing.

If I speak now I shall be talking like a coward, he said to himself: and he was happily too prudent to talk to her in that strain. So he said nothing of peace and safety. She was almost at liberty to believe that he approved the wisdom of her resolution. At the maestro's door she thanked him for his escort, and begged for it further within an hour. 'And do bring me some chocolate.' She struck her teeth together champing in a pretty hunger for it. 'I have no chocolate in my pocket, and I hardly know myself.'

'What will your Signor Antonio say?'

Vittoria filliped her fingers. 'His rule is over, and he is *my* slave: I am not his. I will not eat much; but some—some I must have.'

Ammiani laughed and promised to obtain it. 'That is, if there 's any to be had.'

'Break open doors to get it for me,' she said, stamping with fun to inspirit him.

No sooner was she standing alone, than her elbow was gently plucked at on the other side : a voice was sibilating : 'S-s-signorina.' She allowed herself to be drawn out of the light of the open doorway, having no suspicion and no fear. 'Signorina, here is chocolate.' She beheld two hands in cup-shape, surcharged with packets of Turin chocolate.

'Luigi, it is you ? '

The Motterone spy screwed his eyelids to an expression of the shrewdest secresy.

'Hist ! signorina. Take some. You shall have all, but wait :—by-and-by. Aha ! you look at my eyes as you did on the Motterone, because one of them takes the shoulder-view ; but, the truth is, my father was a contrabandist, and had his eye in his ear when the frontier guard sent a bullet through his back, cotton-bags and cutleries, and all ! I inherit from him, and have been wry-eyed ever since. How does that touch a man's honesty, signorina ? Not at all. Don't even suspect that you won't appreciate Luigi by-and-by. So, you won't ask me a word, signorina, but up you go to the maestro :—signorina, I swear I am your faithful servant : —up to the maestro, and down first. Come down first : not last :—first. Let *the other one* come down after you ; and you come down first. Leave her behind, la Lazzeruola ; and here,' Luigi displayed a black veil, the common head-dress of the Milanese women, and twisted his fingers round and round on his forehead to personate the horns of the veil ; 'take it, signorina ; you know how to wear it. Luigi and the saints watch over you.'

Vittoria found herself left in possession of the veil and a packet of chocolate.

'If I am watched over by the saints and Luigi!' she thought, and bit at the chocolate.

When the door had closed upon her, Luigi resumed his station near it, warily casting his glances along the house-fronts, and moving his springy little legs like a heath-cock alert. They carried him sharp to an opposite corner of the street at a noise of some one running exposed to all eyes right down the middle of the road, straight to the house: in which foolish person he discerned Beppo, all of whose proceedings Luigi observed and commented on from the safe obscurity under eaves and starlight, while Beppo was in the light of the lamps. 'You thunder at the door, my Beppo. You are a fire-balloon: you are going to burn yourself up with what you carry. You think you can do something, because you read books and frequent the talking theatres—fourteen syllables to a word. Mother of heaven! will you never learn anything from natural intelligence? There you are, in at the door. And now you will disturb the signorina, and you will do nothing but make la Lazzeruola's ears lively. Bounce! you are up the stairs. Bounce! you are on the landing. Thrum! you drum at the door, and they are singing; they don't hear you. And now you 're meek as a mouse. That 's it—if you don't hit the mark when you go like a bullet, you 're stupid as lead. And they call you a clever fellow! Luigi's day is to come. When all have paid him all round, they will acknowledge Luigi's worth. You are honest enough, my Beppo; but you might as well be a countryman. You are the signorina's servant, but *I* know the turnings, said the rat to the cavaliere weazel.'

In a few minutes Beppo stepped from the house, and flung himself with his back against the lintel of the doorway.

'That looks like determination to stop on guard,' said Luigi.

He knew the exact feeling expressed by it, when one has come violently on an errand and has done no good.

'A flea, my feathery lad, will set you flying again.'

As it was imperative in Luigi's schemes that Beppo should be set flying again, he slipped away stealthily, and sped fast into the neighbouring Corso, where a light English closed carriage, drawn by a pair of the island horses, moved at a slow pace. Two men were on the driver's seat, one of whom Luigi hailed to come down: then he laid a strip of paper on his knee, and after thumping on the side of his nose to get a notion of English-Italian, he wrote with a pencil, dancing upon one leg all the while for a balance :—

'Come, Beppo, daughter sake, now, at once, immediate, Beppo, signor.'

'That 's to the very extremity how the little signora Inglese would write,' said Luigi; yet cogitating profoundly in a dubitative twinkle of a second as to whether it might not be the English habit to wind up a hasty missive with an expediting oath. He had heard the oath of emphasis in that island: but he decided to let it go as it stood. The man he had summoned was directed to take it straightway and deliver it to one who would be found at the house-door of the maestro Rocco Ricci: 'Thus, like a drunken sentinel,' said Luigi, folding his arms, crossing his legs, and leaning back. 'Forward, Matteo, my cherub.'

'All goes right?' the coachman addressed Luigi.

'As honey, as butter, as a mulberry leaf with a score of worms on it! The wine and the bread and the cream-cheeses are inside, my dainty one, are they? She must not starve, nor must I. Are our hampers fastened out-

side ? Good. We shall be among the Germans in a day and a night. I 've got the route, and I pronounce the name of the chateau very perfectly—" Schloss Sonnenberg." Do that if you can.'

The unpractised Italian coachman declined to attempt it. He and Luigi compared time by their watches. In three-quarters of an hour he was to be within hail of the maestro's house. Thither Luigi quietly returned.

Beppo's place there was vacant.

' That 's better than a draught of Asti,' said Luigi.

The lighted windows of the maestro's house, and the piano striking corrective notes, assured him that the special rehearsal was still going on ; and as he might now calculate on two or three minutes to spare, he threw back his coat-collar, lifted his head, and distended his chest, apparently to chime in with the singing, but simply to listen to it. For him, it was imperative that he should act the thing, in order to apprehend and appreciate it.

A hurried footing told of the approach of one whom he expected.

' Luigi ! '

' Here, padrone.'

' You have the chocolate ? '

' Signor Antonio, I have deposited it in the carriage.'

' She is in up there ? '

' I beheld her entering.'

' Good ; that is fixed fact.' The signor Antonio drove at his moustache right and left. ' I give you, see, Italian money and German money : German money in paper ; and a paper written out by me to explain the value of the German paper-money. Silence, engine that you are, and not a man ! I am preventive of stupidity, I am ? Do I not know that, hein ? Am I in need of the acclamation of you, my friend ? On to the Château Sonnenberg :—drive on, drive on, and one who

stops you, you drive over him : the gendarmes in white will peruse *this* paper, if there is any question, and will pass you and the cage, bowing ; you hear ? It is a pass ; the military pass you when you show this paper. My good friend, Captain Weisspriess, on the staff of General Pierson, gives it, signed, and it is effectual. But you lose not the paper : put it away with the paper-money, quite safe. For yourself, this is half your pay—I give you napoleons ; ten. Count. And now—once at the Château Sonnenberg, I repeat, you leave her in charge of two persons, one a woman, at the gate, and then back—frrrrr. . . .'

Antonio-Pericles smacked on the flat of his hand, and sounded a rapid course of wheels.

'Back, and drop not a crumb upon the road. You have your map. It is, after Roveredo, straight up the Adige, by Bolzano . . . say "Botzen."'

'"Botz,"' said Luigi, submissively.

'"Botz" — "Botz" — ass ! fool ! double idiot ! "Bōtzén !"' Antonio-Pericles corrected him furiously, exclaiming to the sovereign skies, 'Though I pay for brains, can I get them ! No. But make a fiasco, Luigi, and not a second ten for you, my friend : and away, out of my sight, show yourself no more !'

Luigi humbly said that he was not the instrument of a fiasco.

Half spurning him, Antonio-Pericles snarled an end both to his advices and his prophetic disgust of the miserable tools furnished unto masterly minds upon this earth. He paced forward and back, murmuring in French, 'Mon Dieu ! was there ever such a folly as in the head of this girl ? It is her occasion :—Shall I be a Star ? Shall I be a Cinder ? It is to-morrow night her moment of Birth ! No ; she prefers to be extinguished. For what ? For this thing she calls her

country. It is infamous. Yes, vile little cheat! But, do you know Antonio-Pericles? Not yet. I will nourish you, I will imprison you: I will have you tortured by love, by the very devil of love, by the red-hot pincers of love, till you scream a music, and die to melt him with your voice, and kick your country to the gutter, and know your Italy for a birthplace and a cradle of Song, and no more, and enough! Bah!'

Having thus delivered himself of the effervescence of his internal agitation, he turned sharply round upon Luigi, with a military stamp of the foot and shout of the man's name.

'It is love she wants,' Antonio-Pericles resumed his savage soliloquy. 'She wants to be kindled on fire. Too much Government of brain; not sufficient Insurrection of heart! There it is. There it lies. But, little fool! you shall find people with arms and shots and cannon running all up and down your body, firing and crying out "Victory for Love!" till you are beaten, till you gasp "Love! love! love!" and then comes a beatific—oh! a heaven and a hell to your voice. I will pay,' the excited connoisseur pursued more deliberately —'I will pay half my fortune to bring this about. I am fortified, for I know such a voice was sent to be sublime.' He exclaimed in an ecstasy: 'It opens the skies!' and immediately appended: 'It is destined to suffocate the theatres!'

Pausing as before a splendid vision: 'Money—let it go like dust! I have an object. Sandra Belloni—you stupid Vittoria Campa!—I have millions and the whole Austrian Government to back me, and you to be wilful, little rebel! I could laugh. It is only Love you want. Your voice is now in a marble chamber. I will put it in a palace of cedarwood. This Ammiani I let visit you in the hope that he would touch you.

Milan

Bah! he is a patriot—not a man! He cannot make you wince and pine, and be cold and be hot, and—Bah! I give a chance to some one else who is not a patriot. He has done mischief with the inflammable little Anna von Lenkenstein—I know it. Your proper lovers, you women, are the broad, the business lovers, and Weisspriess is your man.'

Antonio-Pericles glanced up at the maestro's windows. 'Hark! it is her voice,' he said, and drew up his clenched fists with rage, as if pumping. 'Cold as ice! Not a flaw. She is a lantern with no light in it—crystal, if you like. Hark now at Irma, the stork-neck. Aïe! what a long way it is from your throat to your head, mademoiselle Irma! You were reared upon lemons. The split hair of your mural crown is not thinner than that voice of yours. It is a mockery to hear you; but you are good enough for the people, my dear, and you do work, running up and down that ladder of wires between your throat and your head;—you work, it is true, you puss! sleek as a puss, bony as a puss, musical as a puss. But you are good enough for the people. Holà!'

This exclamation was addressed to a cavalier who was dismounting from his horse about fifty yards down the street, and who, giving the reins to a mounted servant, advanced to meet the signor Antonio.

'It is you, Herr Captain von Weisspriess!'

'When he makes an appointment you see him, as a rule, my dear Pericles,' returned the captain.

'You are out of uniform—good. We will go up. Remember, you are a connoisseur, from Bonn—from Berlin—from Leipsic: not of the K.K. army! Abjure it, or you make no way with this mad thing. You shall see her and hear her, and judge if she is worth your visit to Schloss Sonnenberg and a short siege. Good:

we go aloft. You bow to the maestro respectfully twice, as in duty; then a third time, as from a whisper of your soul. Vanitas, vanitatis! You speak of the UT *de poitrine*. You remark: "Albrechtsberger has said——," and you slap your head and stop. They think, "He is polite, and will not quote a German authority to us": and they think, "He will not continue his quotation; in truth, he scornfully considers it superfluous to talk of counterpoint to us poor Italians." Your Christian name is Johann?—you are Herr Johannes. Look at her well. I shall not expose you longer than ten minutes to their observation. Frown meditative; the elbow propped and two fingers in the left cheek; and walk into the room with a stoop: touch a note of the piano, leaning your ear to it as in detection of five-fifteenths of a shade of discord. Frown in trouble as of a tooth. So, when you smile, it is immense praise to them, and easy for you.'

The names of the signor Antonio-Pericles and Herr Johannes were taken up to the maestro.

Tormented with curiosity, Luigi saw them enter the house. The face and the martial or sanguinary reputation of Captain Weisspriess were not unknown to him. 'What has he to do with this affair?' thought Luigi, and sauntered down to the captain's servant, who accepted a cigar from him, but was rendered incorruptible by ignorance of his language. He observed that the horses were fresh, and were furnished with saddle-bags as for an expedition. What expedition? To serve as escort to the carriage?—a nonsensical idea. But the discovery that an idea is nonsensical is not a satisfactory solution of a difficulty. Luigi squatted on his haunches beside the doorstep, a little under one of the lower windows of Rocco Ricci's house. Earlier than he expected, the captain and signor Antonio came out, and as

soon as the door had closed behind them, the captain exclaimed,' I give you my hand on it, my brave Pericles. You have done me many services, but this is finest of all. She 's superb. She 's a nice little wild woman to tame. I shall go to the Sonnenberg immediately. I have only to tell General Pierson that his nephew is to be prevented from playing the fool, and I get leave at once, if there 's no active work.'

' His nephew, Lieutenant Pierson, or Pole—hein ? ' interposed the Greek.

' That 's the man. He 's on the Marshal's staff. He 's engaged to the Countess Lena von Lenkenstein. *She* has fire enough, my Pericles.'

' The Countess Anna, you say ? ' The Greek stretched forward his ear, and was never so near getting it vigorously cuffed.

' Deafness is an unpardonable offence, my dear Pericles.'

Antonio-Pericles sniffed, and assented, ' It is the stupidity of the ear.'

' I said, the Countess Lena.'

' Von Lenkenstein ; but I choose to be further deaf.'

' To the devil, sir. Do you pretend to be angry ? ' cried Weisspriess.

' The devil, sir, with your recommendation, is too black for me to visit him,' Antonio-Pericles rejoined.

' By heaven, Pericles, for less than what you allow yourself to say, I 've sent men to him howling ! '

They faced one another, pulling at their moustachios. Weisspriess laughed.

' You 're not a fighting man, Pericles.'

The Greek nodded affably. ' One is in my way, I have him put out of my way. It is easiest.'

' Ah ! easiest, is it ? ' Captain Weisspriess ' frowned meditative ' over this remarkable statement of a system. ' Well, it certainly saves trouble. Besides, my good

Pericles, none but an ass would quarrel with you. I was observing that General Pierson wants his nephew to marry the Countess Lena immediately ; and if, as you tell me, this girl Belloni, who is called la Vittoria—the precious little woman !—has such power over him, it 's quite as well, from the General's point of view, that she should be out of the way at Sonnenberg. I have my footing at the Duchess of Graätli's. I believe she hopes that I shall some day challenge and kill her husband ; and as I am supposed to have saved Major de Pyrmont's life, I am also an object of present gratitude. Do you imagine that your little brown-eyed Belloni scented one of her enemies in me ? '

' I know nothing of imagination,' the signor Antonio observed frigidly.

' Till we meet ! ' Captain Weisspriess kissed his fingers, half as up toward the windows, and half to the Greek. ' Save me from having to teach love to your Irma ! '

He ran to join his servant.

Luigi had heard much of the conversation, as well as the last sentence.

' It shall be to la Irma if it is to anybody,' Luigi muttered.

' Let Weisspriess—he will not awake love in her—let him kindle hate, it will do,' said the signor Antonio. ' She has seen him, and if he meets her on the route to Meran, she will think it her fascination.'

Looking at his watch and at the lighted windows, he repeated his special injunctions to Luigi. ' It is near the time. I go to sleep. I am getting old : I grow nervous. Ten—twenty in addition, you shall have, if all is done right. Your weekly pay runs on. Twenty—you shall have thirty ! Thirty napoleons additional ! '

Ten fingers were flashed thrice.

Luigi gave a jump. ' Padrone, they are mine.'

'Animal, that shake your belly-bag and brain-box, stand!' cried the Greek, who desired to see Luigi standing firm that he might inspire himself with confidence in his integrity. When Luigi's posture had satisfied him, he turned and went off at great strides.

'He does pay,' Luigi reflected, seeing that immense virtue in his patron. 'Yes, he pays; but what is he about? It is this question for me—"Do I serve my hand? or, Do I serve my heart?" My hand takes the money, and it is not German money. My heart gives the affection, and the signorina has my heart. She reached me that cigarette on the Motterone like the Madonna: it is never to be forgotten! I serve my heart! Now, Beppo, you may come; come quick for her. I see the carriage, and there are three stout fellows in it who could trip and muzzle you at a signal from me before you could count the letters of your father's baptismal name. Oh! but if the signorina disobeys me and comes out last!—the signor Antonio will ask the maestro, who will say, "Yes, la Vittoria was here with me last of the two"; and I lose my ten, my twenty, my thirty napoleons.'

Luigi's chest expanded largely with a melancholy draught of air.

The carriage meantime had become visible at the head of the street, where it remained within hearing of a whistle. One of the Milanese hired vehicles drove up to the maestro's door shortly after, and Luigi cursed it. His worst fears for the future of the thirty napoleons were confirmed; the door opened and the maestro Rocco Ricci, bareheaded and in his black silk dressing-gown, led out Irma di Karski, by some called rival to la Vittoria; a tall Slavic damsel, whose laughter was not soft and smooth, whose cheeks were bright, and whose eyes were deep in the head and dull. But she had vivacity both

of lips and shoulders. The shoulders were bony; the lips were sharp and red, like winter-berries in the morning-rime. Freshness was not absent from her aspect. The critical objection was that it seemed a plastered freshness and not true bloom; or rather it was a savage and a hard, not a sweet freshness. Hence perhaps the name which distinguished her—la Lazzeruola (crab-apple). It was a freshness that did not invite the bite; sour to Italian taste.

She was apparently in vast delight. 'There will be a perfect inundation to-morrow night from Prague and Vienna to see me even in so miserable a part as Michiella,' she said. 'Here I am supposed to be a beginner; I am no débutante there.'

'I can believe it, I can believe it,' responded Rocco, bowing for her speedy departure.

'You are not satisfied with my singing of Michiella's score! Now, tell me, kind, good, harsh old master! you think that *Miss* Vittoria would sing it better. So do I. And *I* can sing another part better. You do not know my capacities.'

'I am sure there is nothing you would not attempt,' said Rocco, bowing resignedly.

'There never was question of my courage.'

'Yes, but courage, courage! away with your courage!' Rocco was spurred by his personal grievances against her in a manner to make him forget his desire to be rid of her. 'Your courage sets you flying at once at every fioritura and bravura passage, to subdue, not to learn: not to accomplish, but to conquer it. And the ability, let me say, is not in proportion to the courage, which is probably too great to be easily equalled; but you have the opportunity to make your part celebrated to-morrow night, if, as you tell me, the house is to be packed with Viennese, and, signorina, you let your hair down.'

The hair of Irma di Karski was of singular beauty, and so dear to her that the allusion to the triumphant feature of her person passed off Rocco's irony in sugar.

'Addio! I shall astonish you before many hours have gone by,' she said; and this time they bowed together, and the maestro tripped back hurriedly, and shut his door.

Luigi's astonishment eclipsed his chagrin when he beheld the lady step from her place, bidding the driver move away as if he carried a freight, and indicating a position for him at the end of the street, with an imperative sway and deflection of her hand. Luigi heard the clear thin sound of a key dropped to her from one of the upper windows. She was quick to seize it; the door opened stealthily to her, and she passed out of sight without casting a look behind. 'That 's a woman going to discover a secret, if she can,' remarked the observer; meaning that he considered the sex bad Generals, save when they have occasion to preserve themselves secret; then they look behind them carefully enough. The situation was one of stringent torment to a professional and natural spy. Luigi lost count of minutes in his irritation at the mystery, which he took as a personal offence. Some suspicion or wariness existed in the lighted room, for the maestro threw up a window, and inspected the street to right and left. Apparently satisfied he withdrew his head, and the window was closed.

In a little while Vittoria's voice rose audible out of the stillness, though she restrained its volume.

Its effect upon Luigi was to make him protest to her, whimpering with pathos as if she heard and must be melted: 'Signorina! signorina, most dear! for charity's sake! I am one of you; I am a patriot. Every man to his trade, but my heart is all with you.' And so on,

louder by fits, in a running murmur, like one having his conscience ransacked, from which he was diverted by a side-thought of Irma di Karski, la Lazzeruola, listening, taking poison in at her ears ; for Luigi had no hesitation in ascribing her behaviour to jealousy. 'Does not *that* note drive through your bosom, excellent lady ? I can fancy the tremble going all down your legs. You are poisoned with honey. How you hate it ! If you only had a dagger ! '

Vittoria sang but for a short space. Simultaneously with the cessation of her song Ammiani reached the door, but had scarcely taken his stand there when, catching sight of Luigi, he crossed the street, and recognizing him, questioned him sternly as to his business opposite the maestro's house. Luigi pointed to a female figure emerging. 'See ! take her home,' he said. Ammiani released him and crossed back hurriedly, when, smiting his forehead, Luigi cried in despair, 'Thirty napoleons and my professional reputation lost ! ' He blew a whistle ; the carriage dashed down from the head of the street. While Ammiani was following the swiftly-stepping figure in wonderment (knowing it could not be Vittoria, yet supposing it must be, without any clear aim of his wits), the carriage drew up a little in advance of her ; three men—men of bulk and sinew—jumped from it ; one threw himself upon Ammiani, the others grasped the affrighted lady, tightening a veil over her face, and the carriage-door shut sharp upon her. Ammiani's assailant then fell away : Luigi flung himself on the box and shouted, 'The signorina is behind you ! ' And Ammiani beheld Vittoria standing in alarm, too joyful to know that it was she. In the spasm of joy he kissed her hands. Before they could intercommunicate intelligibly the carriage was out of their sight, going at a gallop along the eastern strada of the circumvallation of the city.

CHAPTER XV

AMMIANA THROUGH THE MIDNIGHT

Ammiani hurried Vittoria out of the street to make safety sure. 'Home,' she said, ashamed of her excitement, and not daring to speak more words, lest the heart in her throat should betray itself. He saw what the fright had done for her. Perhaps also he guessed that she was trying to conceal her fancied cowardice from him. 'I have kissed her hands,' he thought, and the memory of it was a song of tenderness in his blood by the way.

Vittoria's dwelling-place was near the Duomo, in a narrow thoroughfare leading from the Duomo to the Piazza of La Scala, where a confectioner of local fame conferred upon the happier members of the population most piquant bocconi and tartlets, and offered by placard to give an emotion to the nobility, the literati, and the epicures of Milan, and to all foreigners, if the aforesaid would adventure upon a trial of his art. Meanwhile he let lodgings. It was in the house of this famous confectioner Zotti that Vittoria and her mother had lived after leaving England for Italy. As Vittoria came under the fretted shadow of the cathedral, she perceived her mother standing with Zotti at the house-door, though the night was far advanced. She laughed, and walked less hurriedly. Ammiani now asked her if she had been alarmed. 'Not alarmed,' she said, 'but a little more nervous than I thought I should be.'

He was spared from putting any further question by her telling him that Luigi, the Motterone spy, had in all probability done her a service in turning one or other

of the machinations of the signor Antonio. 'My madman,' she called this latter. 'He has got his Irma instead of me. We shall have to supply her place to-morrow; she is travelling rapidly, and on my behalf! I think, signor Carlo, you would do well by going to the maestro when you leave me, and telling him that Irma has been caught into the skies. Say, "Jealous that earth should possess such overpowering loveliness," or "Attracted in spite of themselves by that combination of genius and beauty which is found united nowhere but in Irma, the spirits of heaven determined to rob earth of her Lazzeruola." Only tell it to him seriously, for my dear Rocco will have to work with one of the singers all day, and I ought to be at hand by them to help her, if I dared stir out. What do you think?'

Ammiani pronounced his opinion that it would be perilous for her to go abroad.

'I shall in truth, I fear, have a difficulty in getting to La Scala unseen,' she said; 'except that we are cunning people in our house. We not only practise singing and invent wonderful confectionery, but we do conjuring tricks. We profess to be able to deceive anybody whom we please.'

'Do the dupes enlist in a regiment?' said Ammiani, with an intonation that professed his readiness to serve as a recruit. His humour striking with hers, they smiled together in the bright fashion of young people who can lose themselves in a ray of fancy at any season.

Vittoria heard her mother's wailful voice. 'Twenty gnats in one,' she said.

Ammiani whispered quickly to know whether she had decided for the morrow. She nodded, and ran up to her mother, who cried:—

'At this hour! And Beppo has been here after you, and

he told me I wrote for him, in Italian, when not a word can I put to paper : I wouldn't !—and you are threatened by dreadful dangers, he declares. His behaviour was mad ; they are all mad over in this country, I believe. I have put the last stitch to your dress. There is a letter or two upstairs for you. Always letters ! '

'My dear good Zotti,' Vittoria turned to the artist in condiments, 'you must insist upon my mother going to bed at her proper time when I am out.'

'Signorina,' rejoined Zotti, a fat little round-headed man, with vivacious starting brown eyes, 'I have only to tell her to do a thing—I pull a dog by the collar ; be it said with reverence.'

'However, I am very glad to see you both such good friends.'

'Yes, signorina, we are good friends till we quarrel again. I regret to observe to you that the respectable lady is incurably suspicious. Of me—Zotti ! Mother of heaven ! '

'It is you that are suspicious of me, sir,' retorted madame. 'Of me, of all persons ! It 's " tell me this, tell me that," all day with you ; and because I can't answer, you are angry.'

'Behold ! the signora speaks English ; we have quarrelled again,' said Zotti.

'My mother thinks him a perfect web of plots,' Vittoria explained the case between them, laughing, to Ammiani ; 'and Zotti is persuaded that she is an inveterate schemer. They are both entirely innocent, only they are both excessively timid. Out of that it grows.'

The pair dramatized her outline on the instant :

' " Did I not see him speak to an English lady, and he will not tell me a word about it, though she 's my own countrywoman ? " '

' " Is it not true that she received two letters this

afternoon, and still does she pretend to be ignorant of what is going on ? " '

'Happily,' said Vittoria, 'my mother is not a widow, or these quarrels might some day end in a fearful reconciliation.'

'My child,' her mother whimpered, 'you know what these autumn nights are in this country; as sure as you live, Emilia, you will catch cold, and then you 're like a shop with shutters up for the dead.'

At the same time Zotti whispered: 'Signorina, I have kept the minestra hot for your supper; come in, come in. And, little things, little dainty bits!—do you live in Zotti's house for nothing? Sweetest delicacies that make the tongue run a stream!—just notions of a taste—the palate smacks and forgets; the soul seizes and remembers!'

'Oh, such seductions!' Vittoria exclaimed.

'It is,' Zotti pursued his idea, with fingers picturesquely twirling in a spider-like distension; 'it is like the damned, and they have but a crumb of a chance of Paradise, and down swoops St. Peter and has them in the gates fast! You are worthy of all that a man can do for you, signorina. Let him study, let him work, let him invent,—you are worthy of all.'

'I hope I am not too hungry to discriminate! Zotti: I see Monte Rosa.'

'Signorina, you are pleased to say so when you are famishing. It is because——' the enthusiastic confectioner looked deep and oblique, as one who combined a remarkable subtlety of insight with profound reflection; 'it is because the lighter you get the higher you mount; up like an eagle of the peaks! But we 'll give that hungry fellow a fall. A dish of hot minestra shoots him dead. Then, a tart of pistachios and chocolate and cream—and my head to him who shall reveal to me the flavouring!'

'When I wake in the morning, I shall have lived a month or two in Arabia, Zotti. Tell me no more; I will come in,' said Vittoria.

'Then, signorina, a little crisp filbert-biscuit—a composition! You crack it, and a surprise! And then, and then *my* dish; Zotti's dish, that is not yet christened. Signorina, let Italy rise first'; the great inventor of the dish winked and nodded temperately. 'Let her rise. A battle or a treaty will do. I have two or three original conceptions, compositions, that only wait for some brilliant feat of arms, or a diplomatic triumph, and I send them forth baptized.'

Vittoria threw large eyes upon Ammiani, and set the underlids humorously quivering. She kissed her fingers: 'Addio; a rivederla.' He bowed formally: he was startled to find the golden thread of their companionship cut with such cruel abruptness. But it was cut; the door had closed on her. The moment it had closed she passed into his imagination. By what charm had she allayed the fever of his anxiety? Her naturalness had perforce given him assurance that peace must surround one in whom it shone so steadily, and smiling at the thought of Zotti's repast and her twinkle of subdued humour, he walked away comforted; which, for a lover in the season of peril means exalted, as in a sudden conflagration of the dry stock of his intelligence. 'She must have some great faith in her heart,' he thought, no longer attributing his exclusion from it to a lover's rivalry, which will show that more than imagination was on fire within him. For when the soul of a youth can be heated above common heat, the vices of passion shrivel up and aid the purer flame. It was well for Ammiani that he did perceive (dimly though it was perceived) the force of idealistic inspiration by which Vittoria was supported. He saw it at this one moment,

and it struck a light to light him in many subsequent perplexities ; it was something he had never seen before. He had read Tuscan poetry to her in old Agostino's rooms ; he had spoken of secret preparations for the revolt ; he had declaimed upon Italy,—the poetry was good though the declamation may have been bad,—but she had always been singularly irresponsive, with a practical turn for ciphers. A quick reckoning, a sharp display of figures in Italy's cause, kindled her cheeks and took her breath. Ammiani now understood that there lay an unspoken depth in her, distinct from her visible nature.

He had first an interview with Rocco Ricci, whom he prepared to replace Irma.

His way was then to the office of his Journal, where he expected to be greeted by two members of the Polizia, who would desire him to march before the central bureau, and exhibit proofs of articles and the items of news for inspection, for correction haply, and possibly for approval. There is a partial delight in the contemplated submission to an act of servitude for the last time. Ammiani stepped in with combative gaiety, but his stiff glance encountered no enemy. This astonished him. He turned back into the street and meditated. The Pope's Mouth might, he thought, hold the key to the riddle. It is not always most comfortable for a conspirator to find himself unsuspected : he reads the blank significantly. It looked ill that the authorities should allow anything whatsoever to be printed on such a morrow : especially ill, if they were on the alert. The neighbourhood by the Pope's Mouth was desolate under dark starlight. Ammiani got his fingers into the opening behind the rubbish of brick, and tore them on six teeth of a saw that had been fixed therein. Those teeth were as voluble to him as loud tongues. The Mouth was empty of any shred

of paper. They meant that the enemy was ready to bite, and that the conspiracy had ceased to be active. He perceived that a stripped ivy-twig, with the leaves scattered around it, stretched at his feet. That was another and corroborative sign, clearer to him than printed capitals. The reading of it declared that the Revolt had collapsed. He wound and unwound his handkerchief about his fingers mechanically: great curses were in his throat. 'I would start for South America at dawn, but for her!' he said. The country of Bolivar still had its attractions for Italian youth. For a certain space Ammiani's soul was black with passion. He was the son of that fiery Paolo Ammiani who had cast his glove at Eugène's feet, and bade the viceroy deliver it to his French master. (The General was preparing to break his sword on his knee when Eugène rushed up to him and kissed him.) Carlo was of this blood. Englishmen will hardly forgive him for having tears in his eyes, but Italians follow the Greek classical prescription for the emotions, while we take example by the Roman. There is no sneer due from us. He sobbed. It seemed that a country was lost.

Ammiani had moved away slowly: he was accidentally the witness of a curious scene. There came into the irregular triangle, and walking up to where the fruit-stalls stood by day, a woman and a man. The man was an Austrian soldier. It was an Italian woman by his side. The sight of the couple was just then like an incestuous horror to Ammiani. She led the soldier straight up to the Mouth, directing his hand to it, and, what was far more wonderful, directing it so that he drew forth a packet of papers from where Ammiani had found none. Ammiani could see the light of them in his hand. The Austrian snatched an embrace and ran. Ammiani was moving over to her to seize and denounce the traitress,

when he beheld another figure like an apparition by her side; but this one was not a whitecoat. Had it risen from the earth? It was earthy, for a cloud of dust was about it, and the woman gave a stifled scream. 'Barto! Barto!' she cried, pressing upon her eyelids. A strong husky laugh came from him. He tapped her shoulder heartily, and his 'Ha! ha!' rang in the night air.

'You never trust me,' she whimpered from shaken nerves.

He called her, 'Brave little woman! rare girl!'

'But you *never* trust me!'

'Do I not lay traps to praise you?'

'You make a woman try to deceive you.'

'If she could! If only she could!'

Ammiani was up with them.

'You are Barto Rizzo,' he spoke, half leaning over the man in his impetuosity.

Barto stole a defensive rearward step. The thin light of dawn had in a moment divided the extreme starry darkness, and Ammiani, who knew his face, had not to ask a second time. It was scored by a recent sword-cut. He glanced at the woman: saw that she was handsome. It was enough; he knew she must be Barto's wife, and, if not more cunning than Barto, his accomplice, his instrument, his slave.

'Five minutes ago I would have sworn you were a traitress,' he said to her.

She was expressionless, as if she had heard nothing; which fact, considering that she was very handsome, seemed remarkable to the young man. Youth will not believe that stupidity and beauty can go together.

'She is the favourite pupil of Bartolommeo Rizzo, signor Carlo Ammiani,' quoth Barto, having quite regained his composure. 'She is my pretty puppet-

patriot. I am not in the habit of exhibiting her; but since you see her, there she is.'

Barto had fallen into the Southern habit of assuming ease in quasi-rhetorical sentences, but with wary eyes over them. The peculiar, contracting, owl-like twinkle defied Ammiani's efforts to penetrate his look; so he took counsel of his anger, and spoke bluntly.

'She does your work?'

'Much of it, signor Carlo: as the bullet does the work of the rifle.'

'Beast! was it your wife who pinned the butterfly to the signorina Vittoria's dress?'

'Signor Carlo Ammiani, you are the son of Paolo, the General: you call me beast? I have dandled you in my arms, my little lad, while the bands played "*There 's yet a heart in Italy!*" Do you remember it?' Barto sang out half-a-dozen bars. 'You call me beast? I 'm the one man in Milan who can sing you that.'

'Beast or man, devil or whatever you are!' cried Ammiani, feeling nevertheless oddly unnerved, 'you have committed a shameful offence: you, or the woman, your wife, who serves you, as I see. You have thwarted the best of plots; you have dared to act in defiance of your Chief——'

'Eyes to him!' Barto interposed, touching over his eyeballs.

'And you have thrown your accursed stupid suspicions on the signorina Vittoria. You are a mad fool. If I had the power, I would order you to be shot at five this morning; and that 's the last rising of the light you should behold. Why did you do it? Don't turn your hellish eyes in upon one another, but answer at once! Why did you do it?'

'The signorina Vittoria,' returned Barto—his articulation came forth serpent-like—'she is not a spy, you think.

She has been in England : I have been in England. She writes ; I can read. She is a thing of whims. Shall she hold the goblet of Italy in her hand till it overflows ? She writes love-letters to an English whitecoat. I have read them. Who bids her write ? Her whim ! She warns her friends not to enter Milan. She—whose puppet is she ? Not yours ; not mine. She is the puppet of an English Austrian ! '

Barto drew back, for Ammiani was advancing.

' What is it you mean ? ' he cried.

' I mean,' said Ammiani, still moving on him, ' I mean to drag you first before Count Medole, and next before the signorina ; and you shall abjure your slander in her presence. After that I shall deal with you. Mark me ! I have you : I am swifter on foot, and I am stronger. Come quietly.'

Barto smiled in grim contempt.

' Keep your foot fast on that stone,—you 're a prisoner,' he replied, and seeing Ammiani coming, ' Net him, my sling-stone ! my serpent ! ' he signalled to his wife, who threw herself right round Ammiani in a tortuous twist hard as wire-rope. Stung with irritation, and a sense of disgrace and ridicule and pitifulness in one, Ammiani, after a struggle, ceased the attempt to disentwine her arms, and dragged her clinging to him. He was much struck by hearing her count deliberately, in her desperation, numbers from somewhere about twenty to one hundred. One hundred was evidently the number she had to complete, for when she had reached it she threw her arms apart. Barto was out of sight. Ammiani waved her on to follow in his steps : he was sick of her presence, and had the sensations of a shame-faced boy whom a girl has kissed. She went without uttering a word.

The dawn had now traversed the length of the streets,

and thrown open the wide spaces of the city. Ammiani found himself singing, '*There 's yet a heart in Italy !*' but it was hardly the song of his own heart. He slept that night on a chair in the private room of his office, preferring not to go to his mother's house. '*There 's yet a heart in Italy !*' was on his lips when he awoke with scattered sensations, all of which collected in revulsion against the song. 'There 's a very poor heart in Italy !' he said, while getting his person into decent order ; 'it 's like the bell in the lunatic's tower between Venice and the Lido : it beats now and then for meals : hangs like a carrion-lump in the vulture's beak meanwhile !'

These and some other similar sentiments, and a heat about the brows whenever he set them frowning over what Barto had communicated concerning an English Austrian, assured Ammiani that he had no proper command of himself : or was, as the doctors would have told him, bilious. It seemed to him that he must have dreamed of meeting the dark and subtle Barto Rizzo overnight ; on realizing that fact he could not realize how the man had escaped him, except that when he thought over it, he breathed deep and shook his shoulders. The mind will, as you may know, sometimes refuse to work when the sensations are shameful and astonished. He despatched a messenger with a 'good morrow' to his mother, and then went to a fencing-saloon that was fitted up in the house of Count Medole, where, among two or three, there was the ordinary shrugging talk of the collapse of the projected outbreak, bitter to hear. Luciano Romara came in, and Ammiani challenged him to small-sword and broadsword. Both being ireful to boiling point, and mad to strike at something, they attacked one another furiously, though they were dear friends, and the helmet-wires and the padding rattled and smoked to the thumps. For half an hour they held on to it, when, their blood being up, they flashed

upon the men present, including the count, crying shame to them for letting a woman alone be faithful to her task that night. The blood forsook Count Medole's cheeks, leaving its dead hue, as when blotting-paper is laid on running-ink. He deliberately took a pair of foils, and offering the handle of one to Ammiani, broke the button off the end of his own, and stood to face an adversary. Ammiani followed the example: a streak of crimson was on his shirt-sleeve, and his eyes had got their hard black look, as of the flint-stone, before Romara in amazement discovered the couple to be at it in all purity of intention, on the sharp edge of the abyss. He knocked up their weapons and stood between them, puffing his cigarette leisurely.

'I fine you both,' he said.

He touched Ammiani's sword-arm, nodded with satisfaction to find that there was no hurt, and cried, 'You have an Austrian out on the ground by this time to-morrow morning. So, according to the decree!'

'Captain Weisspriess is in the city,' was remarked.

'There are a dozen on the list,' said little Pietro Cardi, drawing out a paper.

'If you are to be doing nothing else to-morrow morning,' added Leone Rufo, 'we may as well march out the whole dozen.'

These two were boys under twenty.

'Shall it be the first hit for Captain Weisspriess?' Count Medole said this while handing a fresh and fairly-buttoned foil to Ammiani.

Romara laughed: 'You will require to fence the round of Milan city, my dear count, to win a *claim* to Captain Weisspriess. In the first place, *I* yield him to no man who does not show himself a better man than I. It 's the point upon which I don't pay compliments.'

Count Medole bowed.

'But, if you want occupation,' added Luciano, closing his speech with a merely interrogative tone.

'I scarcely want that, as those who know me will tell you,' said Medole, so humbly, that those who knew him felt that he had risen to his high seat of intellectual contempt. He could indulge himself, having shown his courage.

'Certainly not; if you are devising means of subsistence for the widows and orphans of the men who will straggle out to be slaughtered to-night,' said Luciano; 'you have occupation in that case.'

'I will do my best to provide for them,'—the count persisted in his air of humility,—'though it is a question with some whether idiots should live.' He paused effectively, and sucked in a soft smile of self-approbation at the stroke. Then he pursued: 'We meet the day after to-morrow. The Pope's Mouth is closed. We meet here at nine in the morning. The next day at eleven at Farugino's, the barber's, in Monza. The day following at Camerlata, at eleven likewise. Those who attend will be made aware of the dispositions for the week, and the day we shall name for the rising. It is known to you all, that without affixing a stigma on our new prima-donna, we exclude her from any share in this business. All the Heads have been warned that we yield this night to the Austrians. Gentlemen, I cannot be more explicit. I wish that I could please you better.'

'Oh, by all means,' said Pietro Cardi: 'but patience is the pestilence; I shall roam in quest of adventure. Another quiet week is a tremendous trial.'

He crossed foils with Leone Rufo, but finding no stop to the drawn 'swish' of the steel, he examined the end of his weapon with a lengthening visage, for it was buttonless. Ammiani burst into laughter at the spontaneous boyishness in the faces of the pair of ambitious

lads. They both offered him one of the rapiers upon equal terms. Count Medole's example of intemperate vanity was spoiling them.

'You know my opinion,' Ammiani said to the count. 'I told you last night, and I tell you again to-day, that Barto Rizzo is guilty of gross misconduct, and that you must plead the same to a sort of excuseable treason. Count Medole, you cannot wind and unwind a conspiracy like a watch. Who is the head of this one? It is the man Barto Rizzo. He took proceedings before he got you to sanction them. You may be the vessel, but he commands, or at least, he steers it.'

The count waited undemonstratively until Ammiani had come to an end. 'You speak, my good Ammiani, with an energy that does you credit,' he said, 'considering that it is not in your own interest, but another person's. Remember, I can bear to have such a word as treason ascribed to my acts.'

Fresh visitors, more or less mixed in the conspiracy, and generally willing to leave the management of it to Count Medole, now entered the saloon. These were Count Rasati, Angelo Dovili, a Piedmontese General, a Tuscan duke, and one or two aristocratic notabilities and historic nobodies. They were hostile to the Chief whom Luciano and Carlo revered and obeyed. The former lit a cigarette, and saying to his friend, 'Do you breakfast with your mother? I will come too,' slipped his hand on Ammiani's arm; they walked out indolently together, with the smallest shade of an appearance of tolerating scorn for those whom they left behind.

'Medole has money and rank and influence, and a kind of I-don't-know-what womanishness, that makes him push like a needle for the lead, and he will have the lead! and when he has got the lead, there 's the last chapter of him,' said Luciano. 'His point of ambition is the

perch of the weather-cock. Why did he set upon you, my Carlo ? I saw the big V running up your forehead when you faced him. If you had finished him no great harm would have been done.'

'I saw him for a short time last night, and spoke to him in my father's style,' said Carlo. 'The reason was, that he defended Barto Rizzo for putting the ring about the signorina Vittoria's name, and causing the black butterfly to be pinned to her dress.'

Luciano's brows stood up.

'If she sings to-night, depend upon it there will be a disturbance,' he said. 'There may be a rising in spite of Medole and such poor sparks, who 're afraid to drop on powder, and twirl and dance till the wind blows them out. And mind, the chance rising is commonly the luckiest. If I get a command I march to the Alps. We must have the passes of the Tyrol. It seems to me that whoever holds the Alps must ride the Lombard mare. You spring booted and spurred into the saddle from the Alps.'

Carlo was hurt by his friend's indifference to the base injury done to Vittoria.

'I have told Medole that she will sing to-night in spite of him,' he was saying, with the intention of bringing round some reproach upon Luciano for his want of noble sympathy, when the crash of an Austrian regimental band was heard coming up the Corso. It stirred him to love his friend with all his warmth. 'At any rate, for my sake, Luciano, you will respect and uphold her.'

'Yes, while she 's true,' said Luciano, unsatisfactorily.

The regiment, in review uniform, followed by two pieces of artillery, passed by. Then came a squadron of hussars and one of Uhlans, and another foot regiment, more artillery, fresh cavalry.

'Carlo, if three generations of us pour out our blood to

fertilize Italian ground, it 's not too much to pay to chase those drilled curs.' Luciano spoke in vehement undertone.

' We 'll breakfast and have a look at them in the Piazza d'Armi, and show that we Milanese are impressed with a proper idea of their power,' said Carlo, brightening as he felt the correction of his morbid lover's anger in Luciano's reaching view of their duties as Italian citizens. The heat and whirl of the hour struck his head, for to-morrow they might be wrestling with that living engine which had marched past, and surely all the hate he could muster should be turned upon the outer enemy. He gained his mother's residence with clearer feelings.

CHAPTER XVI

COUNTESS AMMIANI

Countess Ammiani was a Venetian lady of a famous House, the name of which is as a trumpet sounding from the inner pages of the Republic. Her face was like a leaf torn from an antique volume ; the hereditary features told the story of her days. The face was sallow and fireless ; life had faded like a painted cloth upon the imperishable moulding. She had neither fire in her eyes nor colour on her skin. The thin close multitudinous wrinkles ran up accurately ruled from the chin to the forehead's centre, and touched faintly once or twice beyond, as you observe the ocean ripples run in threads confused to smoothness within a space of the grey horizon sky. But the chin was firm, the mouth and nose were firm, the forehead sat calmly above these shows of decay. It was a most noble face ; a fortress face ; strong and

massive, and honourable in ruin, though stripped of every flower.

This lady in her girlhood had been the one lamb of the family dedicated to heaven. Paolo, the General, her lover, had wrenched her from that fate to share with him a life of turbulent sorrows till she should behold the blood upon his grave. She, like Laura Piaveni, had bent her head above a slaughtered husband, but, unlike Laura, Marcellina Ammiani had not buried her heart with him. Her heart and all her energies had been his while he lived ; from the visage of death it turned to her son. She had accepted the passion for Italy from Paolo ; she shared it with Carlo. Italian girls of that period had as little passion of their own as flowers kept out of sunlight have hues. She had given her son to her country with that intensely apprehensive foresight of a mother's love which runs quick as Eastern light from the fervour of the devotion to the remote realization of the hour of the sacrifice, seeing both in one. Other forms of love, devotion in other bosoms, may be deluded, but hers will not be. She sees the sunset in the breast of the springing dawn. Often her son Carlo stood a ghost in her sight. With this haunting prophetic vision, it was only a mother, who was at the same time a supremely noble woman, that could feel all human to him notwithstanding. Her heart beat thick and fast when Carlo and Luciano entered the morning-room where she sat, and stopped to salute her in turn.

'Well ?' she said, without betraying anxiety or playing at carelessness.

Carlo answered, 'Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die. I think that 's the language of peaceful men.'

'You are to be peaceful men to-morrow, my Carlo ?'

'The thing is in Count Medole's hands,' said Luciano ; 'and he is constitutionally of our Agostino's opinion that

we are bound to wait till the Gods kick us into action; and, as Agostino says, Medole has raised himself upon our shoulders so as to be the more susceptible to their wishes when they blow a gale.'

He informed her of the momentary thwarting of the conspiracy, and won Carlo's gratitude by not speaking of the suspicion which had fallen on Vittoria.

'Medole,' he said, 'has the principal conduct of the business in Milan, as you know, countess. Our Chief cannot be everywhere at once; so Medole undertakes to decide for him here in old Milan. He decided yesterday afternoon to put off our holiday for what he calls a week. Checco, the idiot, in whom he confides, gave me the paper signifying the fact at four o'clock. There was no appeal; for we can get no place of general meeting under Medole's prudent management. He fears our being swallowed in a body if we all meet.'

The news sent her heart sinking in short throbs down to a delicious rest; but Countess Ammiana disdained to be servile to the pleasure, even as she had strengthened herself to endure the shocks of pain. It was a conquered heart that she and every Venetian and Lombard mother had to carry; one that played its tune according to its nature, shaping no action, sporting no mask. If you know what is meant by that phrase, a conquered heart, you will at least respect them whom you call weak women for having gone through the harshest schooling which this world can show example of. In such mothers Italy revived. The pangs and the martyrdom were theirs. Fathers could march to the field or to the grey glacis with their boys; there was no intoxication of hot blood to cheer those who sat at home watching the rise and fall of trembling scales which said life or death for their dearest. Their least shadowy hope could be but a shrouded contentment in prospect; a shrouded sub-

mission in feeling. What bloom of hope was there when Austria stood like an iron wall, and their own ones dashing against it were as little feeble waves that left a red mark and no more? But, duty to their country had become their religion; sacrifice they accepted as their portion; when the last stern evil befell them they clad themselves in a veil and walked upon an earth they had passed from for all purposes save service of hands. Italy revived in these mothers. Their torture was that of the re-animation of her frame from the death-trance.

Carlo and Luciano fell hungrily upon dishes of herb-flavoured cutlets, and Neapolitan maccaroni, green figs, green and red slices of melon, chocolate, and a dry red Florentine wine. The countess let them eat, and then gave her son a letter that had been delivered at her door an hour back by the confectioner Zotti. It proved to be an enclosure of a letter addressed to Vittoria by the Chief. Genoa was its superscription. From that place it was forwarded by running relays of volunteer messengers. There were points of Italy which the Chief could reach four-and-twenty hours in advance of the Government with all its aids and machinery. Vittoria had simply put her initials at the foot of the letter. Carlo read it eagerly and cast it aside. It dealt in ideas and abstract phraseology; he could got nothing of it between his impatient teeth; he was reduced to a blank wonder at the reason for her sending it on to him. It said indeed—and so far it seemed to have a meaning for her:—

'No backward step. We can bear to fall; we cannot afford to draw back.'

And again:—

'Remember that these uprisings are the manifested pulsations of the heart of your country, so that none shall say she is a corpse, and knowing that she lives, none shall

say that she deserves not freedom. It is the protest of her immortal being against her impious violator.'

Evidently the Chief had heard nothing of the counter-stroke of Barto Rizzo, and of Count Medole's miserable weakness : but how, thought Carlo, how can a mind like Vittoria's find matter to suit her in such sentences ? He asked himself the question, forgetting that a little time gone by, while he was aloof from the tumult and dreaming of it, this airy cloudy language and every symbolism, had been strong sustaining food, a vital atmosphere, to him. He did not for the moment (though by degrees he recovered his last night's conception of her) understand that among the nobler order of women there is, when *they* plunge into strife, a craving for idealistic truths, which men are apt, under the heat and hurry of their energies, to put aside as stars that are meant merely for shining.

His mother perused the letter—holding it out at arm's length—and laid it by ; Luciano likewise. Countess Ammiani was an aristocrat : the tone and style of the writing were distasteful to her. She allowed her son's judgement of the writer to stand for her own, feeling that she could surrender little prejudices in favour of one who appeared to hate the Austrians so mortally. On the other hand, she defended Count Medole. Her soul shrank at the thought of the revolution being yielded up to theorists and men calling themselves men of the people—a class of men to whom Paolo her soldier-husband's aversion had always been formidably pronounced. It was an old and a wearisome task for Carlo to explain to her that the times were changed and the necessities of the hour different since the day when his father conspired and fought for freedom. Yet he could not gainsay her when she urged that the nobles should be elected to lead, if they consented to lead ; for if they did not lead, were they not excluded from the movement ?

'I fancy you have defined their patriotism,' said Carlo.

'Nay, my son; but you are one of them.'

'Indeed, my dearest mother, that is not what they will tell you.'

'Because you have chosen to throw yourself into the opposite ranks.'

'You perceive that you divide our camp, madame my mother. For me there is no natural opposition of ranks. What are we? We are slaves: all are slaves. While I am a slave, shall I boast that I am of noble birth? "Proud of a coronet with gems of paste!" some one writes. Save me from that sort of pride! I am content to take my patent of nobility for good conduct in the revolution. Then I will be count, or marquis, or duke;—I am not a Republican pure blood;—but not till then. And in the meantime——'

'Carlo is composing for his newspaper,' the countess said to Luciano.

'Those are the leaders who can lead,' the latter replied. 'Give the men who are born to it the first chance. Old Agostino is right—the people owe them their vantage ground. But when they have been tried and they have failed, decapitate them. Medole looks upon revolution as a description of conjuring trick. He shuffles cards and arranges them for a solemn performance, but he refuses to cut them if you look too serious or I look too eager; for that gives him a suspicion that you know what is going to turn up; and his object is above all things to produce a surprise.'

'You are both of you unjust to Count Medole,' said the countess. 'He imperils more than all of you.'

'Magnificent estates, it is true; but of head or of heart not quite so much as some of us,' said Luciano, stroking his thick black pendent moustache and chin-tuft. 'Ah, pardon me; yes! he does imperil a finer cock's comb.

When he sinks, and his vanity is cut in two, Medole will bleed so as to flood his Lombard flats. It will be worse than death to him.'

Carlo said : 'Do you know what our Agostino says of Count Medole ? '

'Oh, for ever Agostino with you young men ! ' the countess exclaimed. 'I believe he laughs at you.'

'To be sure he does : he laughs at all. But, what he says of Count Medole holds the truth of the thing, and may make you easier concerning the count's estates. He says that Medole is *vaccine matter* which the Austrians apply to this generation of Italians to spare us the terrible disease. They will or they won't deal gently with Medole, by-and-by ; but for the present he will be handled tenderly. He is useful. I wish I could say that we thought so too. And now,' Carlo stooped to her and took her hand, 'shall we see you at La Scala to-night ? '

The countess, with her hands lying in his, replied : 'I have received an intimation from the authorities that my box is wanted.'

'So you claim your right to occupy it ! '

'That is my very humble protest for personal liberty.'

'Good : I shall be there, and shall much enjoy an introduction to the gentleman who disputes it with you. Besides, mother, if the signorina Vittoria sings . . .'

Countess Ammiani's gaze fixed upon her son with a level steadiness. His voice threatened to be unequal. All the pleading force of his eyes was thrown into it, as he said : 'She will sing : and she gives the signal ; that is certain. We may have to rescue her. If I can place her under your charge, I shall feel that she is safe, and is really protected.'

The countess looked at Luciano before she answered : 'Yes, Carlo, whatever I can do. But you know I have not a scrap of influence.'

'Let her lie on your bosom, my mother.'

'Is this to be another Violetta?'

'Her name is Vittoria,' said Carlo, colouring deeply. A certain Violetta had been his boy's passion.

Further distracting Austrian band-music was going by. This time it was a regiment of Italians in the white and blue uniform. Carlo and Luciano leaned over the balcony, smoking, and scanned the marching of their fellow-countrymen in the livery of servitude.

'They don't step badly,' said one; and the other, with a smile of melancholy derision, said, 'We are all brothers!'

Following the Italians came a regiment of Hungarian grenadiers, tall, swart-faced, and particularly light-limbed men, looking brilliant in the clean tight military array of Austria. Then a squadron of blue hussars, and a Croat regiment; after which, in the midst of Czech dragoons and German Uhlans and blue Magyar light horsemen, with General officers and aides about him, the veteran Austrian Field-Marshal rode, his easy hand and erect figure and good-humoured smile belying both his age and his reputation among Italians. Artillery, and some bravely-clad horse of the Eastern frontier, possibly Serb, wound up the procession. It gleamed down the length of the Corso in a blinding sunlight; brass helmets and hussar feathers, white and violet surcoats, green plumes, maroon capes, bright steel scabbards, bayonet-points,—as gallant a show as some portentously-magnified summer field, flowing with the wind, might be; and over all the banner of Austria—the black double-headed eagle ramping on a yellow ground. This was the flower of iron meaning on such a field.

The two young men held their peace. Countess Ammiani had pushed her chair back into a dark corner of the room, and was sitting there when they looked back, like a sombre figure of black marble.

CHAPTER XVII

IN THE PIAZZA D'ARMI

Carlo and Luciano followed the regiments to the Piazza d'Armi, drawn after them by that irresistible attraction to youths who have as yet had no shroud of grief woven for them—desire to observe the aspect of a brilliant foe.

The Piazza d'Armi was the field of Mars of Milan, and an Austrian review of arms there used to be a tropical pageant. The place was too narrow for broad manœuvres, or for much more than to furnish an inspection of all arms to the General, and a display (with its meaning) to the populace. An unusually large concourse of spectators lined the square, like a black border to a vast bed of flowers, nodding now this way, now that. Carlo and Luciano passed among the groups, presenting the perfectly smooth faces of young men of fashion, according to the universal aristocratic pattern handed down to querulous mortals from Olympus—the secret of which is to show a triumphant inaction of the heart and the brain, that are rendered positively subservient to elegance of limb. They knew the chances were in favour of their being arrested at any instant. None of the higher members of the Milanese aristocracy were visible; the people looked sullen. Carlo was attracted by the tall figure of the signor Antonio-Pericles, whom he beheld in converse with the commandant of the citadel, out in the square, among chatting and laughing General officers. At Carlo's elbow there came a burst of English tongues; he heard Vittoria's English name spoken with animation. 'Admire those faces,' he said to Luciano, but the latter was interchanging quiet recognitions among

various heads of the crowd; a language of the eyelids and the eyebrows. When he did look round he admired the fair island faces with an Italian's ardour: 'Their women are splendid!' and he no longer pushed upon Carlo's arm to make way ahead. In the English group were two sunny-haired girls and a blue-eyed lady with the famous English curls, full, and rounding richly. This lady talked of her brother, and pointed him out as he rode down the line in the Marshal's staff. The young officer indicated presently broke away and galloped up to her, bending over his horse's neck to join the conversation. Emilia Belloni's name was mentioned. He stared, and appeared to insist upon a contrary statement. Carlo scrutinized his features. While doing so he was accosted, and beheld his former adversary of the Motterone, with whom he had yesterday shaken hands in the Piazza of La Scala. The ceremony was cordially renewed. Luciano unlinked his arm from Carlo and left him.

'It appears that you are mistaken with reference to mademoiselle Belloni,' said Captain Gambier. 'We hear on positive authority that she will *not* appear at La Scala to-night. It 's a disappointment; though, from what you did me the honour to hint to me, I cannot allow myself to regret it.'

Carlo had a passionate inward prompting to trust this Englishman with the secret. It was a weakness that he checked. When one really takes to foreigners, there is a peculiar impulse (I speak of the people who are accessible to impulse) to make brothers of them. He bowed, and said, 'She does not appear?'

'She has in fact quitted Milan. Not willingly. I would have stopped the business if I had known anything of it; but she is better out of the way, and will be carefully looked after, where she is. By this time she is in the Tyrol.'

'And where?' asked Carlo, with friendly interest.

'At a schloss near Meran. Or she will be there in a very few hours. I feared—I may inform you that we were very good friends in England—I feared that when she once came to Italy she would get into political scrapes. I dare say you agree with me that women have nothing to do with politics. Observe: you see the lady who is speaking to the Austrian officer?—he is her brother. Like mademoiselle Belloni he has adopted a fresh name; it 's the name of his uncle, a General Pierson in the Austrian service. I knew him in England: he has been in our service. Mademoiselle Belloni lived with his sisters for some years—two or three. As you may suppose, they are all anxious to see her. Shall I introduce you? They will be glad to know one of her Italian friends.'

Carlo hesitated; he longed to hear those ladies talk of Vittoria. 'Do they speak French?'

'Oh, dear, yes. That is, as we luckless English people speak it. Perhaps you will more easily pardon their seminary Italian. See there,' Captain Gambier pointed at some trotting squadrons; 'these Austrians have certainly a matchless cavalry. The artillery seems good. The infantry are fine men—very fine men. They have a "woodeny" movement; but that 's in the nature of the case: tremendous discipline alone gives homogeneity to all those nationalities. Somehow they get beaten. I doubt whether anything will beat their cavalry.'

'They are useless in street-fighting,' said Carlo.

'Oh, street-fighting!' Captain Gambier vented a soldier's disgust at the notion. 'They 're not in Paris. Will you step forward?'

Just then the tall Greek approached the party of English. The introduction was delayed.

He was addressed by the fair lady, in the island tongue,

as 'Mr. Pericles.' She thanked him for his extreme condescension in deigning to notice them. But whatever his condescension had been, it did not extend to an admitted acquaintance with the poor speech of the land of fogs. An exhibition of aching deafness was presented to her so resolutely, that at last she faltered, 'What! have you forgotten English, Mr. Pericles? You spoke it the other day.'

'It is ze language of necessity—of commèrce,' he replied.

'But, surely, Mr. Pericles, you dare not presume to tell me you choose to be ignorant of it whenever you please?'

'I do not take grits into ze teeth, madame; no more.'

'But you speak it perfectly.'

'Pèrfect it may be, for ze transactions of commèrce. I wish to keep my teez.'

'Alas!' said the lady, compelled, 'I must endeavour to swim in French.'

'At your service, madame,' quoth the Greek, with an immediate doubling of the length of his body.

Carlo heard little more than he knew; but the confirmation of what we know will sometimes instigate us like fresh intelligence, and the lover's heart was quick to apprehend far more than he knew in one direction. He divined instantaneously that the English-Austrian spoken of by Barto Rizzo was the officer sitting on horseback within half-a-dozen yards of him. The certainty of the thought cramped his muscles. For the rest, it became clear to him that the attempt of the millionaire connoisseur to carry off Vittoria had received the tacit sanction of the Austrian authorities; for reasons quite explicable, Mr. Pericles, as the English lady called him, distinctly hinted it, while affirming with vehement self-laudation that his scheme had succeeded for the vindication of Art.

'The opera you will hear zis night,' he said, 'will be hissed. You will hear a chorus of screech-owls to each song of that poor Irma, whom the Italian people call "crab-apple." Well; she pleases German ears, and if they can support her, it is well. But la Vittoria—your Belloni—you will not hear; and why? She has been false to her Art, false! She has become a little devil in politics. It is a Guy Fawkes *femelle*! She has been guilty of the immense crime of ingratitude. She is dismissed to study, to penitence, and to the society of her old friends, if they will visit her.'

'Of course we will,' said the English lady; 'either before or after our visit to Venice—delicious Venice!'

'Which you have not seen—hein?' Mr. Pericles snarled; 'and have not smelt. There is no music in Venice! But you have nothing but street tinkle-tinkle! A place to live in! mon Dieu!'

The lady smiled. 'My husband insists upon trying the baths of Bormio, and then we are to go over a pass for him to try the grape-cure at Meran. If I can get him to promise me one whole year in Italy, our visit to Venice may be deferred. Our doctor, monsieur, indicates our route. If my brother can get leave of absence, we shall go to Bormio and to Meran with him. He is naturally astonished that Emilia refused to see him; and she refused to see us too! She wrote a letter, dated from the Conservatorio to him,—he had it in his saddle-bag, and was robbed of it and other precious documents, when the wretched, odious people set upon him in Verona—poor boy! She said in the letter that she would see him in a few days after the fifteenth, which is to-day.'

'Ah! a few days after the fifteenth, which is to-day,' Mr. Pericles repeated. 'I saw you but the day before yesterday, madame, or I could have brought you together.

She is now away—off—out of sight—the *perfide*! Ah! false that she is; speak not of her. You remember her in England. There it was trouble, trouble; but here, we are a pot on a fire with her; speak not of her. She has used me ill, madame. I am sick.'

His violent gesticulation drooped. In a temporary abandonment to chagrin, he wiped the moisture from his forehead, unwilling or heedless of the mild ironical mouthing of the ladies, and looked about; for Carlo had made a movement to retire,—he had heard enough for discomfort.

'Ah! my dear Ammiani, the youngest editor in Europe! how goes it with you?' the Greek called out with revived affability.

Captain Gambier perceived that it was time to present his Italian acquaintance to the ladies by name, as a friend of mademoiselle Belloni.

'My most dear Ammiani,' Antonio-Pericles resumed; he barely attempted to conceal his acrid delight in casting a mysterious shadow of coming vexation over the youth; 'I am afraid you will not like the opera *Camilla*, or perhaps it is the Camilla you will not like. But, shoulder arms, march!' (a foot regiment in motion suggested the form of the recommendation) 'what is not for to-day may be for to-morrow. Let us wait. I think, my Ammiani, you are to have a lemon and not an orange. Never mind. Let us wait.'

Carlo got his forehead into a show of smoothness, and said, 'Suppose, my dear signor Antonio, the prophet of dark things were to say to *himself*, "Let us wait?"'

'Hein—it is deep.' Antonio-Pericles affected to sound the sentence, eye upon earth, as a sparrow spies worm or crumb. 'Permit me,' he added rapidly; an idea had struck him from his malicious reserve stores,—

'Here is Lieutenant Pierson, of the staff of the Field-Marshal of Austria, unattached, an old friend of mademoiselle Emilia Belloni,—permit me,—here is Count Ammiani, of the *Lombardia* Milanese journal, a new friend of the signorina Vittoria Campa—mademoiselle Belloni—the signorina Campa—it is the same person, messieurs; permit me to introduce you.'

Antonio-Pericles waved his arm between the two young men.

Their plain perplexity caused him to dash his fingers down each side of his moustachios in tugs of enjoyment.

For Lieutenant Pierson, who displayed a certain readiness to bow, had caught a sight of the repellent stare on Ammiani's face; a still and flat look, not aggressive, yet anything but inviting; like a shield.

Nevertheless, the lieutenant's head produced a stiff nod. Carlo's did not respond; but he lifted his hat and bowed humbly in retirement to the ladies.

Captain Gambier stepped aside with him.

'Inform Lieutenant Pierson, I beg you,' said Ammiani, 'that I am at his orders, if he should consider that I have insulted him.'

'By all means,' said Gambier; 'only, you know, it 's impossible for me to guess what is the matter; and I don't think he knows.'

Luciano happened to be coming near. Carlo went up to him, and stood talking for half a minute. He then returned to Captain Gambier, and said, 'I put myself in the hands of a man of honour. You are aware that Italian gentlemen are not on terms with Austrian officers. If I am seen exchanging salutes with any one of them, I offend my countrymen; and they have enough to bear already.'

Perceiving that there was more in the background, Gambier simply bowed. He had heard of Italian

gentlemen incurring the suspicion of their fellows by merely being seen in proximity to an Austrian officer.

As they were parting, Carlo said to him, with a very direct meaning in his eyes, 'Go to the opera to-night.'

'Yes, I suppose so,' the Englishman answered, and digested the look and the recommendation subsequently.

Lieutenant Pierson had ridden off. The war-machine was in motion from end to end: the field of flowers was a streaming flood; regiment by regiment, the crash of bands went by. Outwardly the Italians conducted themselves with the air of ordinary heedless citizens, in whose bosoms the music set no hell-broth boiling. Patrician and plebeian, they were chiefly boys; though here and there a middle-aged workman cast a look of intelligence upon Carlo and Luciano, when these two passed along the crowd. A gloom of hoarded hatred was visible in the mass of faces, ready to spring fierily. Arms were in the city. With hatred to prompt the blow, with arms to strike, so much dishonour to avenge, we need not wonder that these youths beheld the bit of liberty in prospect magnified by their mighty obfuscating ardour, like a lantern in a fog. Reason did not act. They were in such a state when just to say 'Italia! Italia!' gave them nerve to match an athlete. So, the parading of Austria, the towering athlete, failed of its complete lesson of intimidation, and only ruffled the surface of insurgent hearts. It seemed, and it was, an insult to the trodden people, who read it as a lesson for cravens: their instinct commonly hits the bell. They felt that a secure supremacy would not have paraded itself: so they divined indistinctly that there was weakness somewhere in the councils of the enemy. When the show had vanished, their spirits hung pausing, like the hollow air emptied of big sound, and reacted. Austria

had gained little more by her display than the conscientious satisfaction of the pedagogue who lifts the rod to advise intending juvenile culprits how richly it can be merited and how poor will be their future grounds of complaint.

But before Austria herself had been taught a lesson she conceived that she had but one man and his feeble instruments, and occasional frenzies, opposed to her,—him whom we saw on the Motterone,—which was ceasing to be true; though it was true that the whole *popular* movement flowed from that one man. She observed travelling sparks in the embers of Italy, and crushed them under her heel, without reflecting that a vital heat must be gathering where the spots of fire run with such a swiftness. It was her belief that if she could seize that one man, whom many of the younger nobles and all the people acknowledged as their Chief—for he stood then without a rival in his task—she would have the neck of conspiracy in her angry grasp. Had she caught him, the conspiracy for Italian freedom would not have crowed for many long seasons; the torch would have been ready, but not the magazine. He prepared it; it was he who preached to the Italians that opportunity is a mocking devil when we look for it to be revealed; or, in other words, wait for chance; as it is God's angel when it is created within us, the ripe fruit of virtue and devotion. He cried out to Italians to wait for no inspiration but their own; that they should never subdue their minds to follow any alien example; nor let a foreign city of fire be their beacon. Watching over his Italy; her wrist in his meditative clasp year by year; he stood like a mystic leech by the couch of a fair and hopeless frame, pledged to revive it by the inspired assurance, shared by none, that life had not forsaken it. A body given over to death and vultures—he stood by

it in the desert. Is it a marvel to you that when the carrion-wings swooped low, and the claws fixed, and the beak plucked and savoured its morsel, he raised his arm, and urged the half-resuscitated frame to some vindicating show of existence? Arise! he said, even in what appeared most fatal hours of darkness. The slack limbs moved; the body rose and fell. The cost of the effort was the breaking out of innumerable wounds, old and new; the gain was the display of the miracle that Italy lived. She tasted her own blood, and herself knew that she lived.

Then she felt her chains. The time was coming for her to prove, by the virtues within her, that she was worthy to live, when others of her sons, subtle and adept, intricate as serpents, bold, unquestioning as well-bestridden steeds, should grapple and play deep for her in the game of worldly strife. Now—at this hour of which I speak—when Austrians marched like a merry flame down Milan streets, and Italians stood like the burnt-out cinders of the fire-grate, Italy's faint wrist was still in the clutch of her grave leech, who counted the beating of her pulse between long pauses, that would have made another think life to be heaving its last, not beginning.

The Piazza d'Armi was empty of its glittering show.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE NIGHT OF THE FIFTEENTH

We quit the Piazza d'Armi. Rumour had its home in Milan. On their way to the Caffè La Scala, Luciano and Carlo (who held together, determined to be taken together

if the arrest should come) heard it said that the Chief was in Milan. A man passed by and uttered it, going. They stopped a second man, who was known to them, and he confirmed the rumour. Glad as sunlight once more, they hurried to Count Medole forgivingly. The count's servant assured them that his master had left the city for Monza. 'Is Medole a coward?' cried Luciano, almost in the servant's hearing. The fleeing of so important a man looked vile, now that they were sharpened by new eagerness. Forthwith they were off to Agostino, believing that he would know the truth. They found him in bed. 'Well, and what?' said Agostino, replying to their laughter. 'I am old; too old to stride across a day and night, like you giants of youth. I take my rest when I can, for I must have it.'

'But, you know, O conscript father,' said Carlo, willing to fall a little into his mood, 'you know that nothing will be done to-night.'

'Do I know so much?' Agostino murmured at full length.

'Do you know that the Chief is in the city?' said Luciano.

'A man who is lying in bed knows this,' returned Agostino, 'that he knows less than those who are up, though what he does know he perhaps digests better. 'Tis you who are the fountains, my boys, while I am the pool into which you play. Say on.'

They spoke of the rumour. He smiled at it. They saw at once that the rumour was false, for the Chief trusted Agostino.

'Proceed to Barto, the mole,' he said, 'Barto the miner; he is the father of daylight in the city: of the daylight of knowledge, you understand, for which men must dig deep. Proceed to him;—if you can find him.'

But Carlo brought flame into Agostino's eyes.

'The accursed beast! he has pinned the black butterfly to the signorina's dress.'

Agostino rose on his elbow. He gazed at them. 'We are followers of a blind mole,' he uttered with an inner voice, while still gazing wrathfully, and then burst out in grief, '"Patria o mea creatrix, patria o mea genetrix!"'

'The signorina takes none of his warnings, nor do we. She escaped a plot last night, and to-night she sings.'

'She must not,' said Agostino imperiously.

'She does.'

'I must stop that.' Agostino jumped out of bed.

The young men beset him with entreaties to leave the option to her.

'Fools!' he cried, plunging a rageing leg into his garments. 'Here, Iris! Mercury! fly to Jupiter and say we are all old men and boys in Italy, and are ready to accept a few middle-aged mortals as Gods, if they will come and help us. Young fools! Do you know that when you conspire you are in harness, and yoke-fellows, every one?'

'Yoked to that Barto Rizzo!'

'Yes; and the worse horse of the two. Listen, you pair of Nuremberg puppet-heads! If the Chief were here, I would lie still in my bed. Medole has stopped the outbreak. Right or wrong, he moves a mass; we are subordinates—particles. The Chief can't be everywhere. Milan is too hot for him. Two men are here, concealed—Rinaldo and Angelo Guidascarpi. The rumour springs from that. They have slain Count Paul Lenkenstein, and rushed to old Milan for work, with the blood on their swords. Oh, the tragedy!—when I have time to write it. Let me now go to my girl, to my daughter! The blood of the Lenkenstein must rust on the steel. Angelo slew him: Rinaldo gave him the cross to kiss. You shall have the whole story by-and-by;

but this will be a lesson to Germans not to court our Italian damsels. Lift not that curtain, you Pannonian burglars! Much do we pardon; but bow and viol meet not, save that they be of one wood; especially not when signor bow is from yonderside the Rhœtian Alps, and donzella Viol is a growth of warm Lombardy. Witness to it, Angelo and Rinaldo Guidascarpi! bravo! You boys there—you stand like two Tyrolese salad-spoons! I say that my girl, my daughter, shall never help to fire blank shot. I sent my paternal commands to her yesterday evening. Does the wanton disobey her father and look up to a pair of rocket-headed rascals like you? Apes! if she sings that song to-night, the ear of Italy will be deaf to her for ever after. There 's no engine to stir to-night; all the locks are on it; she will send half-a-dozen *milklings* like you to perdition, and there will be a circle of black blood about her name in the traditions of the insurrection—do you hear? Have I cherished her for that purpose? to have her dedicated to a brawl!'

Agostino fumed up and down the room in a confusion of apparel, savouring his epithets and imaginative peeps while he stormed, to get a relish out of something, as beseems the poetic temperament. The youths were silenced by him; Carlo gladly.

'Troop!' said the old man, affecting to contrast his attire with theirs; 'two graces and a satyr never yet went together, and we 'll not frighten the classic Government of Milan. I go out alone. No, signor Luciano, I am not sworn to Count Medole. I see your sneer: contain it. Ah! what a thing is hurry to a mind like mine. It tears up the trees by the roots, floods the land, darkens utterly my poor quiet universe. I was composing a pastoral when you came in. Observe what you have done with my "Lovely Age of Gold!"'

Agostino's transfigurement from lymphatic poet to fiery man of action, lasted till his breath was short, when the necessity for taking a deep draught of air induced him to fall back upon his idle irony. 'Heads, you illustrious young gentlemen!—heads, not legs and arms, move a conspiracy. Now, you—think what you will of it—are only legs and arms in this business. And if you are insubordinate, you present the shocking fabular spirit of the members of the body in revolt; which is not the revolt we desire to see. I go to my daughter immediately, and we shall all have a fat sleep for a week, while the Tedeschi hunt and stew and exhaust their naughty suspicions. Do you know that the Pope's Mouth is closed? We made it tell a big lie before it shut tight on its teeth—a bad omen, I admit; but the idea was rapturously neat. Barto, the sinner—be sure I throttle him for putting that blot on my swan; only, not yet, not yet: he 's a blind mole, a mad patriot;—but, as I say, our beast Barto drew an Austrian to the Mouth last night, and led the dog to take a letter out of it, detailing the whole plot of to-night, and how men will be stationed at the vicolo here, ready to burst out on the Corso, and at the vicolo there, and elsewhere, all over the city, carrying fire and sword; a systematic map of the plot. It was addressed to Count *Serabiglione*! —my boys! my boys! what do you think of it?—Bravo! though Barto is a deadly beast if he——' Agostino paused. 'Yes, he went too far! too far!'

'Has he only gone too far, do you say?'

Carlo spoke sternly. His elder was provoked enough by his deadness of enthusiasm, and that the boy should dare to stalk on a bare egoistical lover's sentiment to be critical of him, Agostino, struck him as monstrous. With the treachery of controlled rage, Agostino drew near him, and whispered some sentences in his ear.

Agostino then called him his good Spartan boy for keeping brave countenance. 'Wait till you comprehend women philosophically. All 's trouble with them till then. At La Scala to-night, my sons! We have rehearsed the fiasco; the Tedeschi perform it. Off with you, that I may go out alone!'

He seemed to think it an indubitable matter that he would find Vittoria and bend her will.

Agostino had betrayed his weakness to the young men, who read him with the keen eyes of a particular disapprobation. He delighted in the dark web of intrigue, and believed himself to be no ordinary weaver of that sunless work. It captured his imagination, filling his pride with a mounting gas. Thus he had become allied to Medole on the one hand, and to Barto Rizzo on the other. The young men read him shrewdly, but speaking was useless.

Before Carlo parted from Luciano, he told him the burden of the whisper, which had confirmed what he had heard on the Piazzi d'Armi. It was this: Barto Rizzo, aware that Lieutenant Pierson was the bearer of despatches from the Archduke in Milan to the marshal, then in Verona, had followed, and by extraordinary effort reached Verona in advance; had there tricked and waylaid him, and obtained, instead of despatches, a letter of recent date, addressed to him by Vittoria, which compromised the insurrectionary project.

'If that 's the case, my Carlo!' said his friend, and shrugged, and spoke in a very worldly fashion of the fair sex.

Carlo shook him off. For the rest of the day he was alone, shut up with his journalistic pen. The pen traversed seas and continents like an old hack to whom his master has thrown the reins. Apart from the desperate perturbation of his soul, he thought of the

Guidascarpi, whom he knew, and was allied to, and of the Lenkensteins, whom he knew likewise, or had known in the days when Giacomo Piaveni lived, and Bianca von Lenkenstein, Laura's sister, visited among the people of her country. Countess Anna and Countess Lena von Lenkenstein were the German beauties of Milan, lively little women, and sweet. Between himself and Countess Lena there had been tender dealings about the age when sweetmeats have lost their attraction, and the charm has to be supplied. She was rich, passionate for Austria, romantic concerning Italy, a vixen in temper, but with a pearly light about her temples that kept her picture in his memory. And besides, during those days when women are bountiful to us as Goddesses, give they never so little, she had deigned to fondle hands with him; had set the universe rocking with a visible heave of her bosom; jingled all the keys of mystery; and had once (as to embalm herself in his recollection), once had surrendered her lips to him. Countess Lena would have espoused Ammiani, believing in her power to make an Austrian out of such Italian material. The Piaveni revolt had stopped that and all their intercourse by the division of the White Hand, as it was called; otherwise, the hand of the corpse. Ammiani had known also Count Paul von Lenkenstein. To his mind, death did not mean much, however pleasant life might be: his father and his friend had gone to it gaily; and he himself stood ready for the summons: but the contemplation of a domestic judicial execution, which the Guidascarpi seemed to have done upon Count Paul, affrighted him, and put an end to his temporary capacity for labour. He felt as if a spent shot were striking on his ribs; it was the unknown sensation of fear. Changeing, it became pity. 'Horrible deaths these Austrians die!' he said.

For a while he regarded their lot as the hardest. A shaft of sunlight like blazing brass warned him that the day dropped. He sent to his mother's stables, and rode at a gallop round Milan, dining alone in one of the common hotel gardens, where he was a stranger. A man may have good nerve to face the scene which he is certain will be enacted, who shrinks from an hour that is suspended in doubt. He was aware of the pallor and chill of his looks, and it was no marvel to him when two sbirri in mufti, foreign to Milan, set their eyes on him as they passed by to a vacant table on the farther side of the pattering gold-fish pool, where he sat. He divined that they might be in pursuit of the Guidascarpi, and alive to read a troubled visage. 'Yet neither Rinaldo nor Angelo would look as I do now,' he thought, perceiving that these men were judging by such signs, and had their ideas. Democrat as he imagined himself to be, he despised with a nobleman's contempt creatures who were so dead to the character of men of birth as to suppose that they were pale and remorseful after dealing a righteous blow, and that they trembled! Ammiani looked at his hand: no force of his will could arrest its palsy. The Guidascarpi were sons of Bologna. The stupidity of Italian sbirri is proverbial, or a Milanese cavalier would have been astonished to conceive himself mistaken for a Bolognese. He beckoned to the waiter, and said, 'Tell me what place has bred those two fellows on the other side of the fountain.' After a side-glance of scrutiny, the reply was, 'Neapolitans.' The waiter was ready to make an additional remark, but Ammiani nodded and communed with a toothpick. He was sure that those Neapolitans were recruits of the Bolognese Polizia; on the track of the Guidascarpi, possibly. As he was not unlike Angelo Guidascarpi in figure, he became uneasy lest they should blunder 'twixt him and

La Scala ; and the notion of any human power stopping him short of that destination, made Ammiani's hand perfectly firm. He drew on his gloves, and named the place whither he was going, aloud. 'Excellency,' said the waiter, while taking up and pretending to reckon the money for the bill : 'they have asked me whether there are two Counts Ammiani in Milan.' Carlo's eyebrows started. 'Can they be after *me* ?' he thought, and said : 'Certainly ; there is twice anything in this world, and Milan is the epitome of it.'

Acting a part gave him Agostino's catching manner of speech. The waiter, who knew him now, took this for an order to say 'Yes.' He had evidently a respect for Ammiani's name : Carlo supposed that he was one of Milan's fighting men. A sort of answer leading to 'Yes' by a circuit and the assistance of the hearer, was conveyed to the sbirri. They were true Neapolitans : quick to suspect, irresolute upon their suspicions. He was soon aware that they were not to be feared more than are the general race of bunglers, whom the Gods sometimes strangely favour. They perplexed him : for why were they after him ? and what had made them ask whether he had a brother ? He was followed, but not molested, on his way to La Scala.

Ammiani's heart was in full play as he looked at the curtain of the stage. The Night of the Fifteenth had come. For the first few moments his strong excitement fronting the curtain, amid a great host of hearts thumping and quivering up in the smaller measures like his own, together with the predisposing belief that this was to be a night of events, stopped his consciousness that all had been thwarted ; that there was nothing but plot, plot, counterplot and tangle, disunion, silly subtlety, jealousy, vanity, a direful congregation of antagonistic

elements ; threads all loose, tongues wagging, pressure here, pressure there, like an uncertain rage in the entrails of the undirected earth, and no master hand on the spot to fuse and point the intense distracted forces.

The curtain, therefore, hung like any common opera-screen ; big only with the fate of the new prima donna. He was robbed even of the certainty that Vittoria would appear. From the blank aspect of the curtain he turned to the house, which was crowding fast, and was not like listless Milan about to criticize an untried voice. The commonly empty boxes of the aristocracy were full of occupants, and for a wonder the white uniforms were not in excess, though they were to be seen. The first person whom Ammiani met was Agostino, who spoke gruffly. Vittoria had been invisible to him. Neither the maestro, nor the impresario, nor the waiting-women had heard of her. Uncertainty was behind the curtain, as well as in front ; but in front it was the uncertainty which is tipped with expectation, hushing the usual noisy chatter, and setting a daylight of eyes forward. Ammiani spied about the house, and caught sight of Laura Piaveni with Colonel Corte by her side. The Lenkensteins were in the Archduke's box. Antonio-Pericles, and the English lady and Captain Gambier, were next to them. The appearance of a white uniform in his mother's box over the stage caused Ammiani to shut up his glass. He was making his way thither for the purpose of commencing the hostilities of the night, when Countess Ammiani entered the lobby, and took her son's arm with a grave face and a trembling touch.

CHAPTER XIX

THE PRIMA DONNA

'WHOEVER is in my box is my guest,' said the countess, adding a convulsive imperative pressure on Carlo's arm, to aid the meaning of her deep underbreath. She was a woman who rarely exacted obedience, and she was spontaneously obeyed. No questions could be put, no explanations given in the crash, and they threaded on amid numerous greetings in a place where Milanese society had habitually ceased to gather, and found itself now in assembly with unconcealed sensations of strangeness. A card lay on the table of the countess's private retiring-room: it bore the name of General Pierson. She threw off her black lace scarf. 'Angelo Guidascarpi is in Milan,' she said. 'He has killed one of the Lenkensteins, sword to sword. He came to me an hour after you left; the sbirri were on his track; he passed for my son. He is now under the charge of Barto Rizzo, disguised; probably in this house. His brother is in the city. Keep the cowl on your head as long as possible; if these hounds see and identify you, there will be mischief.' She said no more, satisfied that she was understood, but opening the door of the box, passed in, and returned a stately acknowledgement of the salutations of two military officers. Carlo likewise bent his head to them; it was like bending his knee, for in the younger of the two intruders he recognized Lieutenant Pierson. The countess accepted a vacated seat; the cavity of her ear accepted the General's apologies. He informed her that he deeply regretted the intrusion; he was under orders to be present at the opera, and to be

as near the stage as possible, the countess's box being designated. Her face had the unalterable composure of a painted head upon an old canvas. The General persisted in tendering excuses. She replied, 'It is best, when one is too weak to resist, to submit to an outrage quietly.' General Pierson at once took the position assigned to him; it was not an agreeable one. Between Carlo and the lieutenant no attempt at conversation was made.

The General addressed his nephew in English. 'Did you see the girl behind the scenes, Wilfrid?'

The answer was 'No.'

'Pericles has her fast shut up in the Tyrol: the best habitat for her if she objects to a whipping. Did you see Irma?'

'No; she has disappeared too.'

'Then I suppose we must make up our minds to an opera without head or tail. As Pat said of the sack of potatoes, "'twould be a mighty fine beast if it had them."'

The officers had taken refuge in their opera-glasses, and spoke while gazing round the house.

'If neither this girl nor Irma is going to appear, there is no positive necessity for my presence here,' said the General, reduced to excuse himself to himself. 'I'll sit through the first scene and then beat a retreat. I might be off at once; the affair looks harmless enough: only, you know, when there's nothing to see, you must report that you have seen it, or your superiors are not satisfied.'

The lieutenant was less able to cover the irksomeness of his situation with easy talk. His glance rested on Countess Lena von Lenkenstein, a quick motion of whose hand made him say that he should go over to her.

'Very well,' said the General; 'be careful that you

give no hint of this horrible business. They will hear of it when they get home : time enough ! '

Lieutenant Pierson touched at his sister's box on the way. She was very excited, asked innumerable things, —whether there was danger ? whether he had a whole regiment at hand to protect peaceable persons ? ' Otherwise,' she said, ' I shall not be able to keep that man (her husband) in Italy another week. He refused to stir out to-night, though we know that nothing can happen. Your prima donna celestissima is out of harm's way.'

' Oh, she is safe,—ze minx ' ; cried Antonio-Pericles, laughing and saluting the Duchess of Graätli, who presented herself at the front of her box. Major de Pyrmont was behind her, and it delighted the Greek to point them out to the English lady, with a simple intimation of the character of their relationship, at which her curls shook sadly.

' Pardon, madame,' said Pericles. ' In Italy, a husband away, ze friend takes title : it is no more.'

' It is very disgraceful,' she said.

' Ze morales, madame, suit ze sun.'

Captain Gambier left the box with Wilfrid, expressing in one sentence his desire to fling Pericles over to the pit, and in another his belief that an English friend, named Merthyr Powys, was in the house.

' He won't be in the city four-and-twenty hours,' said Wilfrid.

' Well ; you 'll keep your tongue silent.'

' By heavens ! Gambier, if you knew the insults we have to submit to ! The temper of angels couldn't stand it. I 'm sorry enough for these fellows, with their confounded country, but it 's desperate work to be civil to them ; upon my honour, it is ! I wish they would stand up and let us have it over. We have to bear more from the women than the men.'

'I leave you to cool,' said Gambier.

The delayed absence of the maestro from his post at the head of the orchestra, where the musicians sat awaiting him, seemed to confirm a rumour that was now circling among the audience, warning all to prepare for a disappointment. His bâton was brought in and laid on the book of the new overture. When at last he was seen bearing onward through the music-stands, a low murmur ran round. Rocco paid no heed to it. His demeanour produced such satisfaction in the breast of Antonio-Pericles that he rose, and was guilty of the barbarism of clapping his hands. Meeting Ammiani in the lobby, he said, 'Come, my good friend, you shall help me to pull Irma through to-night. She is vinegar—we will mix her with oil. It is only for to-night, to save that poor Rocco's opera.'

'Irma!' said Ammiani; 'she is by this time in Tyrol. Your Irma will have some difficulty in showing herself here within sixty hours.'

'How!' cried Pericles, amazed, and plucking after Carlo to stop him. 'I bet you——'

'How much?'

'I bet you a thousand florins you do not see la Vittoria to-night.'

'Good. I bet you a thousand florins you do not see Irma.'

'No Vittoria, I say!'

'And I say, no Lazzeruola!'

Agostino, who was pacing the lobby, sent Pericles distraught with the same tale of the rape of Irma. He rushed to Signora Piaveni's box and heard it repeated. There he beheld, sitting in the background, an old English acquaintance, with whom Captain Gambier was conversing.

'My dear Powys, you have come all the way from

England to see your favourite's first night. You will be shocked, sir. She has neglected her Art. She is exiled, banished, sent away to study and to compose her mind.'

'I think you are mistaken,' said Laura. 'You will see her almost immediately.'

'Signora, pardon me; do I not know best?'

'You may have contrived badly.'

Pericles blinked and gnawed his moustache as if it were food for patience.

'I would wager a milliard of francs,' he muttered. With absolute pathos he related to Mr. Powys the aberrations of the divinely-gifted voice, the wreck which Vittoria strove to become, and from which he alone was striving to rescue her. He used abundant illustrations, coarse and quaint, and was half hysterical; flashing a white fist and thumping the long projection of his knee with a wolfish aspect. His grotesque sincerity was little short of the shedding of tears.

'And your sister, my dear Powys?' he asked, as one returning to the consideration of shadows.

'My sister accompanies me, but not to the opera.'

'For another campaign—hein?'

'To winter in Italy, at all events.'

Carlo Ammiani entered and embraced Merthyr Powys warmly. The Englishman was at home among Italians: Pericles, feeling that he was not so, and regarding them all as a community of fever-patients without hospital, retired. To his mind it was the vilest treason, the grossest selfishness, to conspire or to wink at the sacrifice of a voice like Vittoria's to such a temporal matter as this, which they called patriotism. He looked on it as one might look on the Hindoo drama of a Suttee. He saw in it just that stupid action of a whole body of fanatics combined to precipitate the devotion of a

precious thing to extinction. And worse; for life was common, and women and Hindoo widows were common; but a Vittorian voice was but one in a generation—in a cycle of years. The religious belief of the connoisseur extended to the devout conception that her voice was a spiritual endowment, the casting of which priceless jewel into the bloody ditch of patriots was far more tragic and lamentable than any disastrous concourse of dedicated lives. He shook the lobby with his tread, thinking of the great night this might have been but for Vittoria's madness. The overture was coming to an end. By tightening his arms across his chest he gained some outward composure, and fixed his eyes upon the stage.

While sitting with Laura Piaveni and Merthyr Powys, Ammiani saw the apparition of Captain Weisspriess in his mother's box. He forgot her injunction, and hurried to her side, leaving the doors open. His passion of anger spurned her admonishing grasp of his arm, and with his glove he smote the Austrian officer on the face. Weisspriess plucked his sword out; the house rose; there was a moment like that of a wild beast's show of teeth. It passed: Captain Weisspriess withdrew in obedience to General Pierson's command. The latter wrote on a slip of paper that two pieces of artillery should be placed in position, and a squad of men about the doors: he handed it out to Weisspriess.

'I hope,' the General said to Carlo, 'we shall be able to arrange things for you without the interposition of the authorities.'

Carlo rejoined, 'General, he has the blood of our family on his hands. I am ready.'

The General bowed. He glanced at the countess for a sign of maternal weakness, saw none, and understood that a duel was down in the morrow's bill of entertain-

ments, as well as a riot possibly before dawn. The house had revealed its temper in that short outburst, as a quivering of quick lightning-flame betrays the forehead of the storm.

Countess Ammiani bade her son make fast the outer door. Her sedate energies could barely control her agitation. In helping Angelo Guidascarpi to evade the law, she had imperilled her son and herself. Many of the Bolognese sbirri were in pursuit of Angelo. Some knew his person; some did not; but if those two before whom she had identified Angelo as being her son Carlo chanced now to be in the house, and to have seen him, and heard his name, the risks were great and various.

'Do you know that handsome young Count Ammiani?' Countess Lena said to Wilfrid. 'Perhaps you do not think him handsome? He was for a short time a playfellow of mine. He is more passionate than I am, and that does not say a little; I warn you! Look how excited he is. No wonder. He is—everybody knows it—he is la Vittoria's lover.'

Countess Lena uttered that sentence in Italian. The soft tongue sent it like a coiling serpent through Wilfrid's veins. In English or in German it would not have possessed the deadly meaning.

She may have done it purposely, for she and her sister Countess Anna studied his face. The lifting of the curtain drew all eyes to the stage.

Rocco Ricci's bâton struck for the opening of one of his spirited choruses; a chorus of villagers, who sing to the burden that Happiness, the aim of all humanity, has promised to visit the earth this day, that she may witness the union of the noble lovers, Camillo and Camilla. Then a shepherd sings a verse, with his hand stretched out to the impending castle. There lives Count Orso: will he

permit their festivities to pass undisturbed ? The puling voice is crushed by the chorus, which protests that the heavens are above Count Orso. But another villager tells of Count Orso's power, and hints at his misdeeds. The chorus rises in reply, warning all that Count Orso has ears wherever three are congregated ; the villagers break apart and eye one another distrustfully, reuniting to the song of Happiness before they disperse. Camillo enters solus. Montini, as Camillo, enjoyed a warm reception ; but as he advanced to deliver his canzone, it was seen that he and Rocco interchanged glances of desperate resignation. Camillo has had love passages with Michiella, Count Orso's daughter, and does not hesitate to declare that he dreads her. The orphan Camilla, who has been reared in yonder castle with her, as her sister, is in danger during all these last minutes which still retain her from his arms.

'If I should never see her—I who, like a poor ghost upon the shores of the dead river, have been flattered with the thought that she would fall upon my breast like a ray of the light of Elysium—if I should never see her more!' The famous tenore threw his whole force into that outcry of projected despair, and the house was moved by it : there were many in the house who shared his apprehension of a foul mischance.

Thenceforward the opera and the Italian audience were as one. All that was uttered had a meaning, and was sympathetically translated. *Camilla* they perceived to be a grave burlesque with a core to it. The quick-witted Italians caught up the interpretation in a flash. 'Count Orso' Austria ; 'Michiella' is Austria's spirit of intrigue ; 'Camillo' is indolent Italy, amorous Italy, Italy aimless ; 'Camilla' is YOUNG ITALY !

Their eagerness for sight of Vittoria was now red-hot,

and when Camillo exclaimed 'She comes!' many rose from their seats.

A scrap of paper was handed to Antonio-Pericles from Captain Weisspriess, saying briefly that he had found Irma in the carriage instead of the little 'v,' thanked him for the joke, and had brought her back. Pericles was therefore not surprised when Irma, as Michiella, came on, breathless, and looking in an excitement of anger; he knew that he had been tricked.

Between Camillo and Michiella a scene of some vivacity ensued—reproaches, threats of calamity, offers of returning endearment upon her part; a display of courtly scorn upon his. Irma made her voice claw at her quondam lover very finely; it was a voice with claws, that entered the hearing sharp-edged, and left it plucking at its repose. She was applauded relishingly when, after vainly wooing him, she turned aside and said—

'What change is this in one who like a reed
Bent to my twisting hands? Does he recoil?
Is this the hound whom I have used to feed
With sops of vinegar and sops of oil?'

Michiella's further communications to the audience make it known that she has allowed the progress toward the ceremonies of espousal between Camillo and Camilla, in order, at the last moment, to show her power over the youth and to plunge the detested Camilla into shame and wretchedness.

Camillo retires: Count Orso appears. There is a duet between father and daughter: she confesses her passion for Camillo, and entreats her father to stop the ceremony;—and here the justice of the feelings of Italians, even in their heat of blood, was noteworthy. Count Orso says that he would willingly gratify his daughter, as it would gratify himself, but that he must

respect the law. 'The law is of your own making,' says Michiella. 'Then, the more must I respect it,' Count Orso replies.

The audience gave Austria credit for that much in a short murmur.

Michiella's aside, 'Till anger seizes him I wait!' created laughter; it came in contrast with an extraordinary pomposity of self-satisfaction exhibited by Count Orso—the flower-faced, tun-bellied basso, Lebruno. It was irresistible. He stood swollen out like a morning cock. To make it further telling, he took off his yellow bonnet with a black-gloved hand, and thumped the significant colours prominently on his immense chest—an idea, not of Agostino's, but Lebruno's own; and Agostino cursed with fury. Both he and Rocco knew that their joint labour would probably have only one night's display of existence in the Austrian dominions, but they grudged to Lebruno the chief merit of despatching it to the Shades.

The villagers are heard approaching. 'My father!' cries Michiella, distractedly; 'the hour is near: it will be death to your daughter! Imprison Camillo: I can bring twenty witnesses to prove that he has sworn you are illegally the lord of this country. You will rue the marriage. Do as you once did. Be bold in time. The arrow-head is on the string—cut the string!'

'As I once did?' replies Orso with frown terrific, like a black crest. He turns broadly and receives the chorus of countrymen in paternal fashion—an admirably acted bit of grave burlesque.

By this time the German portion of the audience had, by one or other of the senses, dimly divined that the opera was a shadow of something concealed—thanks to the buffo-basso Lebruno. Doubtless they would have

seen this before, but that the Austrian censorship had seemed so absolute a safeguard.

'My children! all are my children in this my gladsome realm!' Count Orso says, and marches forth, after receiving the compliment of a choric song in honour of his paternal government. Michiella follows him.

Then came the deep suspension of breath. For, as upon the midnight you count bell-note after bell-note of the toiling hour, and know not in the darkness whether there shall be one beyond it, so that you hang over an abysm until Twelve is sounded, audience and actors gazed with equal expectation at the path winding round from the castle, waiting for the voice of the new prima donna.

'Mia madre!' It issued tremblingly faint. None could say who was to appear.

Rocco Ricci struck twice with his bâton, flung a radiant glance across his shoulders for all friends, and there was joy in the house. Vittoria stood before them.

CHAPTER XX

THE OPERA OF CAMILLA

She was dressed like a noble damsel from the hands of Titian. An Italian audience cannot but be critical in their first glance at a prima donna, for they are asked to do homage to a queen who is to be taken on her merits: all that they have heard and have been taught to expect of her is compared swiftly with the observation of her appearance and her manner. She is crucially examined to discover defects. There is no boisterous loyalty at the outset. And as it was now evident that

Vittoria had chosen to impersonate a significant character, her indications of method were jealously watched for a sign of inequality, either in her motion, or the force of her eyes. So silent a reception might have seemed cruel in any other case ; though in all cases the candidate for laurels must, in common with the criminal, go through the ordeal of justification. Men do not heartily bow their heads until they have subjected the aspirant to some personal contest, and find themselves overmatched. The senses, ready to become so slavish in adulation and delight, are at the beginning more exacting than the judgement, more imperious than the will. A figure in amber and pale blue silk was seen, such as the great Venetian might have sketched from his windows on a day when the Doge went forth to wed the Adriatic : a superb Italian head, with dark banded hair-braid, and dark strong eyes under unabashed soft eyelids ! She moved as, after long gazing at a painting of a fair woman, we may have the vision of her moving from the frame. It was an animated picture of ideal Italia. The sea of heads right up to the highest walls fronted her glistening, and she was mute as moonrise. A virgin who loosens a dove from her bosom does it with no greater effort than Vittoria gave out her voice. The white bird flutters rapidly ; it circles and takes its flight. The voice seemed to be as little the singer's own.

The theme was as follows :—Camilla has dreamed overnight that her lost mother came to her bedside to bless her nuptials. Her mother was folded in a black shroud, looking formless as death, like very death, save that death sheds no tears. She wept, without change of voice, or mortal shuddering, like one whose nature weeps : ' And with the forth-flowing of her tears the knowledge of her features was revealed to me.' Behold the Adige, the Mincio, Tiber, and the Po !—such great

rivers were the tears pouring from her eyes. She threw apart the shroud : her breasts and her limbs were smooth and firm as those of an immortal Goddess : but breasts and limbs showed the cruel handwriting of base men upon the body of a martyred saint. The blood from those deep gashes sprang out at intervals, mingling with her tears. She said :—

'My child ! were I a Goddess, my wounds would heal. Were I a Saint, I should be in Paradise. I am no Goddess, and no Saint : yet I cannot die. My wounds flow and my tears. My tears flow because of no fleshly anguish : I pardon my enemies. My blood flows from my body, my tears from my soul. They flow to wash out my shame. I have to expiate my soul's shame by my body's shame. Oh ! how shall I tell you what it is to walk among my children unknown of them, though each day I bear the sun abroad like my beating heart ; each night the moon, like a heart with no blood in it. Sun and moon they see, but not me ! They know not their mother. I cry to God. The answer of our God is this :—" Give to thy children one by one to drink of thy mingled tears and blood :—then, if there is virtue in them, they shall revive, thou shalt revive. If virtue is not in them, they and thou shall continue prostrate, and the ox shall walk over you." From heaven's high altar, O Camilla, my child, this silver sacramental cup was reached to me. Gather my tears in it, fill it with my blood, and drink.'

The song had been massive in monotones, almost Gregorian in its severity up to this point.

'I took the cup. I looked my mother in the face. I filled the cup from the flowing of her tears, the flowing of her blood ; and I drank ! '

Vittoria sent this last phrase ringing out forcefully. From the inveterate contralto of the interview, she rose

to pure soprano in describing her own action. 'And I drank,' was given on a descent of the voice: the last note was in the minor key—it held the ear as if more must follow: like a wail after a triumph of resolve. It was a masterpiece of audacious dramatic musical genius addressed with sagacious cunning and courage to the sympathizing audience present. The supposed incompleteness kept them listening; the intentness sent that last falling (as it were, broken) note travelling awakeningly through their minds. It is the effect of the minor key to stir the hearts of men with this particular suggestiveness. The house rose, Italians and Germans together. Genius, music, and enthusiasm break the line of nationalities. A rain of nosegays fell about Vittoria; evvivas, bravas, shouts—all the outcries of delirious men surrounded her. Men and women, even among the hardened chorus, shook together and sobbed. 'Agostino!' and 'Rocco!' were called; 'Vittoria!' 'Vittoria!' above all, with increasing thunder, like a storm rushing down a valley, striking in broad volume from rock to rock, humming remote, and bursting up again in the face of the vale. Her name was sung over and over—'Vittoria! Vittoria!' as if the mouths were enamoured of it.

'*Evviva la Vittoria e l' Italia!*' was sung out from the body of the house.

An echo replied—

'"*Italia è il premio della* VITTORIA!"' a well-known saying gloriously adapted, gloriously rescued from disgrace.

But the object and source of the tremendous frenzy stood like one frozen by the revelation of the magic the secret of which she has studiously mastered. A nosegay, the last of the tributary shower, discharged from a distance, fell at her feet. She gave it unconsciously

preference over the rest, and picked it up. A little paper was fixed in the centre. She opened it with a mechanical hand, thinking there might be patriotic orders enclosed for her. It was a cheque for one thousand guineas, drawn upon an English banker by the hand of Antonio-Pericles Agriolopoulos ;—freshly drawn ; the ink was only half dried, showing signs of the dictates of a furious impulse. This dash of solid prose, and its convincing proof that her Art had been successful, restored Vittoria's composure, though not her early statuesque simplicity. Rocco gave an inquiring look to see if she would repeat the song. She shook her head resolutely. Her opening of the paper in the bouquet had quieted the general ebullition, and the expression of her wish being seen, the chorus was permitted to usurp her place. Agostino paced up and down the lobby, fearful that he had been guilty of leading her to anticlimax. He met Antonio-Pericles, and told him so ; adding (for now the mask had been seen through, and was useless any further) that he had not had the heart to put back that vision of Camilla's mother to a later scene, lest an interruption should come which would altogether preclude its being heard. Pericles affected disdain of any success which Vittoria had yet achieved. 'Wait for Act the Third,' he said ; but his irritable anxiousness to hold intercourse with every one, patriot or critic, German, English, or Italian, betrayed what agitation of exultation coursed in his veins. 'Aha!' was his commencement of a greeting ; 'was Antonio-Pericles wrong when he told you that he had a prima donna for you to amaze all Christendom, and whose notes were safe and firm as the footing of the angels up and down Jacob's ladder, my friends ? Aha!'

'Do you see that your uncle is signalling to you ?' Countess Lena said to Wilfrid.

He answered like a man in a mist, and looked neither at her nor at the General, who, in default of his obedience to gestures, came good-humouredly to the box, bringing Captain Weisspriess with him.

'We 're assisting at a pretty show,' he said.

'I am in love with her voice,' said Countess Anna.

'Ay; if it were only a matter of voices, countess.'

'I think that these good people require a trouncing,' said Captain Weisspriess.

'Lieutenant Pierson is not of your opinion,' Countess Anna remarked.

Hearing his own name, Wilfrid turned to them with a weariness well acted, but insufficiently to a jealous observation, for his eyes were quick under the carelessly-dropped eyelids, and ranged keenly over the stage while they were affecting to assist his fluent tongue.

Countess Lena levelled her opera-glass at Carlo Ammiani, and then placed the glass in her sister's hand. Wilfrid drank deep of bitterness. 'That is Vittoria's lover,' he thought; 'the lover of the Emilia who once loved me!'

General Pierson may have noticed this by-play: he said to his nephew in the brief military tone: 'Go out; see that the whole regiment is handy about the house; station a dozen men, with a sergeant, at each of the back-doors, and remain below. I very much mistake, or we shall have to make a capture of this little woman to-night.'

'How on earth,' he resumed, while Wilfrid rose savagely and went out with his stiffest bow, 'this opera was permitted to appear, I can't guess! A child could see through it. The stupidity of our civil authorities passes my understanding—it 's a miracle! We have stringent orders not to take any initiative, or I would stop the Fräulein Camilla from uttering another note.'

'If you did that, I should be angry with you, General,' said Countess Anna.

'And I also think the Government cannot do wrong,' Countess Lena joined in.

The General contented himself by saying: 'Well, we shall see.'

Countess Lena talked to Captain Weisspriess in an undertone, referring to what she called his dispute with Carlo Ammiani. The captain was extremely playful in rejoinders.

'You iron man!' she exclaimed.

'Man of steel would be the better phrase,' her sister whispered.

'It will be an assassination, if it happens.'

'No officer can bear with an open insult, Lena.'

'I shall not sit and see harm done to my old playmate, Anna.'

'Beware of betraying yourself for one who detests you.'

A grand duo between Montini and Vittoria silenced all converse. Camilla tells Camillo of her dream. He pledges his oath to discover her mother, if alive; if dead, to avenge her. Camilla says she believes her mother is in the dungeons of Count Orso's castle. The duo tasked Vittoria's execution of florid passages; it gave evidence of her sound artistic powers.

'I was a fool,' thought Antonio-Pericles; 'I flung my bouquet with the herd. I was a fool! I lost my head!' He tapped angrily at the little ink-flask in his coat-pocket.

The first act, after scenes between false Camillo and Michiella, ends with the marriage of Camillo and Camilla; —a quatuor composed of Montini, Vittoria, Irma, and Lebruno. Michiella is in despair; Count Orso is profoundly sonorous with paternity and devotion to the law. He has restored to Camilla a portion of her mother's sequestrated estates. A portion of the remainder will be handed over to her when he has had experience of her husband's good behaviour. The rest

he considers legally his own by right of documents (Treaties), and by right of possession and his sword. Yonder castle he must keep. It is the key of all his other territories. Without it, his position will be insecure. (Allusion to the Austrian argument that the plains of Lombardy are the strategic defensive lines of the Alps.)

Agostino, pursued by his terror of anticlimax, ran from the sight of Vittoria when she was called, after the fall of the curtain. He made his way to Rocco Ricci (who had given his bow to the public from his perch), and found the maestro drinking Asti to counteract his natural excitement. Rocco told Agostino, that up to the last moment, neither he nor any soul behind the scenes knew Vittoria would be able to appear, except that she had sent a note to him with a pledge to be in readiness for the call. Irma had come flying in late, enraged, and in disorder, praying to take Camilla's part; but Montini refused to act with the seconda donna as prima donna. They had commenced the opera in uncertainty whether it could go on beyond the situation where Camilla presents herself. 'I was prepared to throw up my bâton,' said Rocco, 'and publicly to charge the Government with the rape of our prima donna. Irma I was ready to replace. I could have filled that gap.' He spoke of Vittoria's triumph. Agostino's face darkened. 'Ha!' said he, 'provided we don't fall flat, like your Asti with the cork out. I should have preferred an enthusiasm a trifle more progressive. The notion of travelling backwards is upon me forcibly, after that tempest of acclamation.'

'Or do you think that you have put your best poetry in the first Act?' Rocco suggested with malice.

'Not a bit of it!' Agostino repudiated the idea very angrily, and puffed and puffed. Yet he said, 'I should not be lamenting if the opera were stopped at once.'

'No!' cried Rocco; 'let us have our one night. I bargain for that. Medole has played us false, but we go on. We are victims already, my Agostino.'

'But I do stipulate,' said Agostino, 'that my jewel is not to melt herself in the cup to-night. I must see her. As it is, she is inevitably down in the list for a week's or a month's incarceration.'

Antonio-Pericles had this, in his case, singular piece of delicacy, that he refrained from the attempt to see Vittoria immediately after he had flung his magnificent bouquet of treasure at her feet. In his intoxication with the success which he had foreseen and cradled to its apogee, he was now reckless of any consequences. He felt ready to take patriotic Italy in his arms, provided that it would succeed as Vittoria had done, and on the spot. Her singing of the severe phrases of the opening chant, or hymn, had turned the man, and for a time had put a new heart in him. The consolation was his also, that he had rewarded it the most splendidly—as it were, in golden italics of praise; so that her forgiveness of his disinterested endeavour to transplant her was certain, and perhaps her future implicit obedience or allegiance bought. Meeting General Pierson, the latter rallied him.

'Why, my fine Pericles, your scheme to get this girl out of the way was capitally concerted. My only fear is that on another occasion the Government will take another view of it and you.'

Pericles shrugged. 'The Gods, my dear General, decree. I did my best to lay a case before them; that is all.'

'Ah, well! I am of opinion you will not lay many other cases before the Gods who rule in Milan.'

'I have helped them to a good opera.'

'Are you aware that this opera consists entirely of political allusions?'

General Pierson spoke offensively, as the urbane Austrian military permitted themselves to do upon occasion when addressing the conquered or civilians.

'To me,' returned Pericles, 'an opera—it is music. I know no more.'

'You are responsible for it,' said the General, harshly. 'It was taken upon trust from you.'

'Brutal Austrians!' Pericles murmured. 'And you do not think much of her voice, General?'

'Pretty fair, sir.'

'What wonder she does not care to open her throat to these swine!' thought the changed Greek.

Vittoria's door was shut to Agostino. No voice within gave answer. He tried the lock of the door, and departed. She sat in a stupor. It was harder for her to make a second appearance than it was to make the first, when the shameful suspicion cruelly attached to her had helped to balance her steps with rebellious pride; and more, the great collected wave of her ambitious years of girlhood had cast her forward to the spot, as in a last effort for consummation. Now that she had won the public voice (love, her heart called it) her eyes looked inward; she meditated upon what she had to do, and coughed nervously. She frightened herself with her coughing, and shivered at the prospect of again going forward in the great nakedness of stage-lights and thirsting eyes. And, moreover, she was not strengthened by the character of the music and the poetry of the second Act:—a knowledge of its somewhat inferior quality may possibly have been at the root of Agostino's dread of an anticlimax. The seconda donna had the chief part in it—notably an aria (Rocco had given it to her in compassion) that suited Irma's pure shrieks and the tragic skeleton she could be. Vittoria knew how low she was sinking when she found her soul

in the shallows of a sort of jealousy of Irma. For a little space she lost all intimacy with herself; she looked at her face in the glass and swallowed water, thinking that she had strained a dream and confused her brain with it. The silence of her solitary room coming upon the blaze of light—the colour and clamour of the house, and the strange remembrance of the recent impersonation of an ideal character, smote her with the sense of her having fallen from a mighty eminence, and that she lay in the dust. All those incense-breathing flowers heaped on her table seemed poisonous, and reproached her as a delusion. She sat crouching alone till her tire-women called; horrible talkative things! her own familiar maid Giacinta being the worst to bear with.

Now, Michiella, by making love to Leonardo, Camillo's associate, discovers that Camillo is conspiring against her father. She utters to Leonardo very pleasant promises indeed, if he will betray his friend. Leonardo, a wavering baritono, complains that love should ask for any return save in the coin of the empire of love. He is seduced, and invokes a malediction upon his head should he accomplish what he has sworn to perform. Camilla reposes perfect confidence in this wretch, and brings her more doubtful husband to be of her mind.

Camillo and Camilla agree to wear the mask of a dissipated couple. They throw their mansion open; dicing, betting, intriguing, revellings, maskings, commence. Michiella is courted ardently by Camillo; Camilla trifles with Leonardo and with Count Orso alternately. Jealous again of Camilla, Michiella warns and threatens Leonardo; but she becomes Camillo's dupe, partly from returning love, partly from desire for vengeance on her rival. Camilla persuades Orso to discard Michiella. The infatuated count waxes as the personification of portentous burlesque; he is having

everything his own way. The acting throughout—owing to the real gravity of the vast basso Lebruno's burlesque, and Vittoria's archness—was that of high comedy with a lurid background. Vittoria showed an enchanting spirit of humour. She sang one bewitching barcarole that set the house in rocking motion. There was such melancholy in her heart that she cast herself into all the flippancy with abandonment. The Act was weak in too distinctly revealing the finger of the poetic political squib at a point here and there. The temptation to do it of an Agostino, who had no other outlet, had been irresistible, and he sat moaning over his artistic depravity, now that it stared him in the face. Applause scarcely consoled him, and it was with humiliation of mind that he acknowledged his debt to the music and the singers, and how little they owed to him.

Now Camillo is pleased to receive the ardent passion of his wife, and the masking suits his taste, but it is the vice of his character that he cannot act to any degree subordinately in concert; he insists upon his own positive headship!—(allusion to an Italian weakness for sovereignties; it passed unobserved, and Agostino chuckled bitterly over his excess of subtlety). Camillo cannot leave the scheming to her. He pursues Michiella to subdue her with blandishments. Reproaches cease upon her part. There is a duo between them. They exchange the silver keys, which express absolute intimacy, and give mutual freedom of access. Camillo can now secrete his followers in the castle; Michiella can enter Camilla's blue-room, and ravage her caskets for treasonable correspondence. Artfully she bids him reflect on what she is forfeiting for him; and so helps him to put aside the thought of that which he also may be imperilling.

Irma's shrill crescendos and octave-leaps, assisted by

her peculiar attitudes of strangulation, came out well in this scene. The murmurs concerning the sour privileges to be granted by a Lazzeruola were inaudible. But there has been a witness to the stipulation. The ever-shifting baritono, from behind a pillar, has joined in with an aside phrase here and there. Leonardo discovers that his fealty to Camilla is reviving. He determines to watch over her. Camillo now tosses a perfumed handkerchief under his nose, and inhales the coxcombical incense of the idea that he will do all without Camilla's aid, to surprise her; thereby teaching her to know him to be somewhat a hero. She has played her part so thoroughly that he can choose to fancy her a giddy person; he remarks upon the frequent instances of girls who in their girlhood were wild dreamers becoming after marriage wild wives. His followers assemble, that he may take advantage of the exchanged key of silver. He is moved to seek one embrace of Camilla before the conflict:—she is beautiful! There was never such beauty as hers! He goes to her in the fittest preparation for the pangs of jealousy. But he has not been foremost in practising the uses of silver keys. Michiella, having first arranged with her father to be before Camillo's doors at a certain hour with men-at-arms, is in Camilla's private chamber, with her hand upon a pregnant box of ebony wood, when she is startled by a noise, and slips into concealment. Leonardo bursts through the casement window. Camilla then appears. Leonardo stretches the tips of his fingers out to her; on his knees confesses his guilt and warns her. Camillo comes in. Thrusting herself before him, Michiella points to the stricken couple—'See! it is to show you this that I am here.' Behold occasion for a grand quatuor!

While confessing his guilt to Camilla, Leonardo has excused it by an emphatic delineation of Michiella's

magic sway over him. (Leonardo, in fact, is your small modern Italian Machiavelli, overmatched in cunning, for the reason that he is always at a last moment the victim of his poor bit of heart or honesty : he is devoid of the inspiration of great patriotic aims.) If Michiella (Austrian intrigue) has any love, it is for such a tool. She cannot afford to lose him. She pleads for him ; and, as Camilla is silent on his account, the cynical magnanimity of Camillo is predisposed to spare a fangless snake. Michiella withdraws him from the naked sword to the back of the stage. The terrible repudiation scene ensues, in which Camillo casts off his wife. If it was a puzzle to one Italian half of the audience, the other comprehended it perfectly, and with rapture. It was thus that YOUNG ITALY had too often been treated by the compromising, merely discontented, dallying aristocracy. Camilla cries to him, ' Have faith in me ! have faith in me ! have faith in me ! ' That is the sole answer to his accusations, his threats of eternal loathing, and generally blustering sublimities. She cannot defend herself ; she only knows her innocence. He is inexorable, being the guilty one of the two. Turning from him with crossed arms, Camilla sings :—

' Mother ! it is my fate that I should know
Thy miseries, and in thy footprints go.
Grief treads the starry places of the earth :
In thy long track I feel who gave me birth.
I am alone ; a wife without a lord ;
My home is with the stranger—home abhorr'd !—
But that I trust to meet thy spirit there.
Mother of Sorrows ! joy thou canst not share :
So let me wander in among the tombs,
Among the cypresses and the withered blooms.
Thy soul is with dead suns : there let me be ;
A silent thing that shares thy veil with thee.'

The wonderful viol-like trembling of the contralto tones thrilled through the house. It was the highest homage to Vittoria that no longer any shouts arose: nothing but a prolonged murmur, as when one tells another a tale of deep emotion, and all exclamations, all ulterior thoughts, all gathered tenderness of sensibility, are reserved for the close, are seen heaping for the close, like waters above a dam. The flattery of beholding a great assembly of human creatures bound glittering in wizard subservience to the voice of one soul, belongs to the artist, and is the cantatrice's glory, pre-eminent over whatever poor glory this world gives. She felt it, but she felt it as something apart. Within her was the struggle of Italy calling to Italy: Italy's shame, her sadness, her tortures, her quenchless hope, and the view of Freedom. It sent her blood about her body in rebellious volumes. Once it completely strangled her notes. She dropped the ball of her chin in her throat; paused without ceremony, and recovered herself. Vittoria had too severe an artistic instinct to court reality; and as much as she could she from that moment corrected the underlinings of Agostino's libretto.

On the other hand, Irma fell into all his traps, and painted her Austrian heart with a prodigal waste of colour and frank energy:—

'Now Leonardo is my tool:
Camilla is my slave:
And she I hate goes forth to cool
Her rage beyond the wave.
Joy! joy!
Paid am I in full coin for my caressing;
I take, but give nought, ere the priestly blessing.'

A subtle distinction. She insists upon her reverence for the priestly (papistical) blessing, while she confides her

determination to have it dispensed with in Camilla's case. Irma's known sympathies with the Austrian uniform seasoned the ludicrousness of many of the double-edged verses which she sang or declaimed in recitative. The irony of applauding her vehemently was irresistible.

Camilla is charged with conspiracy, and proved guilty by her own admission.

The Act ends with the entry of Count Orso and his force; conspirators overawed; Camilla repudiated; Count Orso imperially just; Leonardo chagrined; Camillo pardoned; Michiella triumphant. Camillo sacrifices his wife for safety. He holds her estates; and therefore Count Orso, whose respect for law causes him to have a keen eye for matrimonial alliances, is now paternally willing, and even anxious to bestow Michiella upon him when the Pontifical divorce can be obtained; so that the long-coveted fruitful acres may be in the family. The chorus sings a song of praise to Hymen, the 'builder of great Houses.' Camilla goes forth into exile. The word was not spoken, but the mention of 'bread of strangers, strange faces, cold climes,' said sufficient.

'It is a question whether we ought to sit still and see a firebrand flashed in our faces,' General Pierson remarked as the curtain fell. He was talking to Major de Pyrmont outside the Duchess of Graätli's box. Two General officers joined them, and presently Count Serabiglione, with his courtly semi-ironical smile, on whom they straightway turned their backs. The insult was happily unseen, and the count caressed his shaven chin and smiled himself onward. The point for the officers to decide was, whether they dared offend an enthusiastic house—the fiery core of the population of Milan—by putting a stop to the opera before worse should come.

Their own views were entirely military; but they were paralyzed by the recent pseudo-liberalistic despatches from Vienna; and agreed, with some malice in their shrugs, that the odium might as well be left on the shoulders of the bureau which had examined the libretto. In fact, they saw that there would be rank peril in attempting to arrest the course of things within the walls of the house.

'The temper of this people is changeing oddly,' said General Pierson. Major de Pyrmont listened awhile to what they had to say, and returned to the duchess. Amalia wrote these lines to Laura :—

'If she sings that song she is to be seized on the wings of the stage. I order my carriage to be in readiness to take her whither she should have gone last night. Do you contrive only her escape from the house. Georges de P. will aid you. I adore the naughty rebel!'

Major de Pyrmont delivered the missive at Laura's box. He went down to the duchess's chasseur, and gave him certain commands and money for a journey. Looking about, he beheld Wilfrid, who implored him to take his place for two minutes. De Pyrmont laughed. 'She is superb, my friend. Come up with me. I am going behind the scenes. The unfortunate impresario is a ruined man; let us both condole with him. It is possible that he has children, and children like bread.'

Wilfrid was linking his arm to De Pyrmont's, when, with a vivid recollection of old times, he glanced at his uniform with Vittoria's eyes. 'She would spit at me!' he muttered, and dropped behind.

Up in her room Vittoria held council with Rocco, Agostino, and the impresario, Salvolo, who was partly their dupe. Salvolo had laid a freshly-written injunction from General Pierson before her, bidding him to exclude

the chief solo parts from the Third Act, and to bring it speedily to a termination. His case was, that he had been ready to forfeit much if a rising followed; but that simply to beard the authorities was madness. He stated his case by no means as a pleader, although the impression made on him by the prima donna's success caused his urgency to be civil.

'Strike out what you please,' said Vittoria.

Agostino smote her with a forefinger. 'Rogue! you deserve an imperial crown. You have been educated for monarchy. You are ready enough to dispense with what you don't care for, and what is not your own.'

Much of the time was lost by Agostino's dispute with Salvolo. They haggled and wrangled laughingly over this and that printed aria, but it was a deplorable deception of the unhappy man; and with Vittoria's stronger resolve to sing the incendiary song, the more necessary it was for her to have her soul clear of deceit. She said, 'Signor Salvolo, you have been very kind to me, and I would do nothing to hurt your interests. I suppose you must suffer for being an Italian, like the rest of us. The song I mean to sing is not written or printed. What is in the book cannot harm you, for the censorship has passed it; and surely I alone am responsible for singing what is not in the book—I and the maestro. He supports me. We have both taken precautions' (she smiled) 'to secure our property. If you are despoiled, we will share with you. And believe, oh! in God's name, believe that you will not suffer to no purpose!'

Salvolo started from her in a horror of amazement. He declared that he had been miserably deceived and entrapped. He threatened to send the company to their homes forthwith. 'Dare to!' said Agostino; and to

judge by the temper of the house, it was only too certain, that if he did so, La Scala would be a wrecked tenement in the eye of morning. But Agostino backed his entreaty to her to abjure that song; Rocco gave way, and half shyly requested her to think of prudence. She remembered Laura, and Carlo, and her poor little frightened foreign mother. Her intense ideal conception of her duty sank and danced within her brain as the pilot-star dances on the bows of a tossing vessel. All were against her, as the tempest is against the ship. Even light above (by which I would image that which she could appeal to pleading in behalf of the wisdom of her obstinate will) was dyed black in the sweeping obscuration; she failed to recollect a sentence that was to be said to vindicate her settled course. Her sole idea was her holding her country by an unseen thread, and of the everlasting welfare of Italy being jeopardized if she relaxed her hold. Simple obstinacy of will sustained her. You mariners batten down the hatchways when the heavens are dark and seas are angry. Vittoria, with the same faith in her instinct, shut the avenues to her senses—would see nothing, hear nothing. The impresario's figure of despair touched her later. Giacinta drove him forth in the act of smiting his forehead with both hands. She did the same for Agostino and Rocco, who were not demonstrative.

They knew that by this time the agents of the Government were in all probability ransacking their rooms, and confiscating their goods.

'Is your piano hired?' quoth the former.

'No,' said the latter, 'are your slippers?'

They went their separate ways, laughing.

CHAPTER XXI

THE THIRD ACT

The libretto of the Third Act was steeped in the sentiment of Young Italy. I wish that I could pipe to your mind's hearing any notion of the fine music of Rocco Ricci, and touch you to feel the revelations which were in this new voice. Rocco and Vittoria gave the verses a life that cannot belong to them now; yet, as they contain much of the vital spirit of the revolt, they may assist you to some idea of the faith animating its heads, and may serve to justify this history.

Rocco's music in the opera of *Camilla* had been sprung from a fresh Italian well; neither the elegiac-melodious, nor the sensuous-lyrical, nor the joyous buffo; it was severe as an old masterpiece, with veins of buoyant liveliness threading it, and with sufficient distinctness of melody to enrapture those who like to suck the sugar-plums of sound. He would indeed have favoured the public with more sweet things, but Vittoria, for whom the opera was composed, and who had been at his elbow, was young, and stern in her devotion to an ideal of classical music that should elevate and never stoop to seduce or to flatter thoughtless hearers. Her taste had directed as her voice had inspired the opera. Her voice belonged to the order of the simply great voices, and was a royal voice among them. Pure without attenuation, passionate without contortion, when once heard it exacted absolute confidence. On this night her theme and her impersonation were adventitious introductions, but there were passages when her artistic pre-eminence and the sovereign fulness and fire of her singing struck a note of

grateful remembered delight. This is what the great voice does for us. It rarely astonishes our ears. It illumines our souls, as you see the lightning make the unintelligible craving darkness leap into long mountain ridges, and twisting vales, and spires of cities, and inner recesses of light within light, rose-like, toward a central core of violet heat.

At the rising of the curtain the knights of the plains, Rudolfo, Romualdo, Arnoldo, and others, who were conspiring to overthrow Count Orso at the time when Camillo's folly ruined all, assemble to deplore Camilla's banishment, and show, bereft of her, their helplessness and indecision. They utter contempt of Camillo, who is this day to be Pontifically divorced from his wife to espouse the detested Michiella. His taste is not admired. They pass off. Camillo appears. He is, as he knows, little better than a pensioner in Count Orso's household. He holds his lands on sufferance. His faculties are paralyzed. He is on the first smooth shoulder-slope of the cataract. He knows that not only was his jealousy of his wife groundless, but it was forced by a spleenful pride. What is there to do ? Nothing, save resignedly to prepare for his divorce from the conspiratrix Camilla and espousals with Michiella. The cup is bitter, and his song is mournful. He does the rarest thing a man will do in such a predicament—he acknowledges that he is going to get his deserts. The faithfulness and purity of Camilla have struck his inner consciousness. He knows not where she may be. He has secretly sent messengers in all directions to seek her, and recover her, and obtain her pardon : in vain. It is as well, perhaps, that he should never see her more. Accursed, he has cast off his sweetest friend. The craven heart could never beat in unison with hers.

'She is in the darkness : I am in the light. I am a blot upon the light ; she is light in the darkness.'

Montini poured this out with so fine a sentiment that the impatience of the house for sight of its heroine was quieted. But Irma and Lebruno came forward barely under tolerance.

'We might as well be thumping a tambourine,' said Lebruno, during a caress. Irma bit her underlip with mortification. Their notes fell flat as bullets against a wall.

This circumstance aroused the ire of Antonio-Pericles against the libretto and revolutionists. 'I perceive,' he said, grinning savagely, 'it has come to be a concert, not an opera; it is a musical harangue in the market-place. Illusion goes: it is politics here!'

Carlo Ammiani was sitting with his mother and Luciano breathlessly awaiting the entrance of Vittoria. The inner box-door was rudely shaken: beneath it a slip of paper had been thrust. He read a warning to him to quit the house instantly. Luciano and his mother both counselled his departure. The detestable initials 'B. R.,' and the one word 'Sbirri,' revealed who had warned, and what was the danger. His friend's advice and the commands of his mother failed to move him. 'When I have seen her safe; not before,' he said.

Countess Ammiani addressed Luciano: 'This is a young man's love for a woman.'

'The woman is worth it,' Luciano replied.

'No woman is worth the sacrifice of a mother and of a relative.'

'Dearest countess,' said Luciano, 'look at the pit; it 's a cauldron. We shall get him out presently, have no fear: there will soon be hubbub enough to let Lucifer escape unseen. If nothing is done to-night, he and I will be off to the Lago di Garda to-morrow morning, and fish and shoot, and talk with Catullus.'

The countess gazed on her son with sorrowful stern-

ness. His eyes had taken that bright glazed look which is an indication of frozen brain and turbulent heart—madness that sane men enamoured can be struck by. She knew there was no appeal to it.

A very dull continuous sound, like that of an angry swarm, or more like a rapid muffled thrumming of wires, was heard. The audience had caught view of a brown-coated soldier at one of the wings. The curious Croat had merely gratified a desire to have a glance at the semi-circle of crowded heads; he withdrew his own, but not before he had awakened the wild beast in the throng. Yet a little while and the roar of the beasts would have burst out. It was thought that Vittoria had been seized or interdicted from appearing. Conspirators—the knights of the plains—meet: Rudolfos, Romualdos, Arnoldos, and others,—so that you know Camilla is not idle. She comes on in the great scene which closes the opera.

It is the banqueting hall of the castle. The Pontifical divorce is spread upon the table. Courtly friends, guards, and a choric bridal company, form a circle.

'I have obtained it,' says Count Orso: 'but at a cost.'

Leonardo, wavering eternally, lets us know that it is weighted with a proviso: IF Camilla shall not present herself within a certain term, this being the last day of it. Camillo comes forward. Too late, he has perceived his faults and weakness. He has cast his beloved from his arms to clasp them on despair. The choric bridal company gives intervening strophes. Cavaliers enter. 'Look at them well,' says Leonardo. They are the knights of the plains. 'They have come to mock me,' Camillo exclaims, and avoids them.

Leonardo, Michiella, and Camillo now sing a trio that is *tricuspidato*, or a three-pointed manner of declaring their divergent sentiments in harmony. The fast-gathering cavaliers lend masculine character to the

choric refrains at every interval. Leonardo plucks Michiella entreatingly by the arm. She spurns him. He has served her ; she needs him no more ; but she will recommend him in other quarters, and bids him to seek them. 'I will give thee a collar for thy neck, marked "Faithful." It is the utmost I can do for thy species.' Leonardo thinks that he is insulted, but there is a vestige of doubt in him still. 'She is so fair ! she dissembles so magnificently ever ! ' She has previously told him that she is acting a part, as Camilla did. Irma had shed all her hair from a golden circlet about her temples, barbarian-wise. Some Hunnish grandeur pertained to her appearance, and partly excused the infatuated wretch who shivered at her disdain and exulted over her beauty and artfulness.

In the midst of the chorus there is one veiled figure and one voice distinguishable. This voice outlives the rest at every strophe, and contrives to add a supplemental antiphonic phrase that recalls in turn the favourite melodies of the opera. Camillo hears it, but takes it as a delusion of impassioned memory and a mere theme for the recurring melodious utterance of his regrets. Michiella hears it. She chimes with the third notes of Camillo's solo to inform us of her suspicions that they have a serpent among them. Leonardo hears it. The trio is formed. Count Orso, without hearing it, makes a quatuor by inviting the bridal couple to go through the necessary formalities. The chorus changes its measure to one of hymeneals. The unknown voice closes it ominously with three bars in the minor key. Michiella stalks close around the rank singers like an enraged daughter of Attila. Stopping in front of the veiled figure, she says :—

'Why is it thou wearest the black veil at my nuptials ?'

'Because my time of mourning is not yet ended.'

'Thou standest the shadow in my happiness.'

'The bright sun will have its shadow.'
'I desire that all rejoice this day.'
'My hour of rejoicing approaches.'
'Wilt thou unveil?'
'Dost thou ask to look the storm in the face?'
'Wilt thou unveil?'
'Art thou hungry for the lightning?'
'I bid thee unveil, woman!'

Michiella's ringing shriek of command produces no response.

'It is she!' cries Michiella, from a contracted bosom; smiting it with clenched hands.

'Swift to the signatures. O rival! what bitterness hast thou come hither to taste.'

Camilla sings aside: 'If yet my husband loves me and is true.'

Count Orso exclaims: 'Let trumpets sound for the commencement of the festivities. The lord of his country may slumber while his people dance and drink!'

Trumpets flourish. Witnesses are called about the table. Camillo, pen in hand, prepares for the supreme act. Leonardo at one wing watches the eagerness of Michiella. The chorus chants to a muted measure of suspense, while Camillo dips pen in ink.

'She is away from me: she scorns me: she is lost to me. Life without honour is the life of swine. Union without love is the yoke of savage beasts. O me miserable! Can the heavens themselves plumb the depth of my degradation?'

Count Orso permits a half-tone of paternal severity to point his kindly hint that time is passing. When he was young, he says, in the broad and benevolently frisky manner, he would have signed ere the eye of the maiden twinkled her affirmative, or the goose had shed its quill.

Camillo still trifles. Then he dashes the pen to earth.

'Never! I have but one wife. Our marriage is irrevocable. The dishonoured man is the everlasting outcast. What are earthly possessions to me, if within myself shame faces me? Let all go. Though I have lost Camilla, I will be worthy of her. Not a pen—no pen; it is the sword that I must write with. Strike, O count! I am here: I stand alone. By the edge of this sword, I swear that never deed of mine shall rob Camilla of her heritage; though I die the death, she shall not weep for a craven!'

The multitude break away from Camilla—veiled no more, but radiant; fresh as a star that issues through corrupting vapours, and with her voice at a starry pitch in its clear ascendency:—

'Tear up the insufferable scroll!—
O thou, my lover and my soul!
It is the Sword that reunites;
The Pen that our perdition writes.'

She is folded in her husband's arms.
Michiella fronts them, horrid of aspect:—

'Accurst divorced one! dost thou dare
To lie in shameless fondness there?
Abandoned! on thy lying brow
Thy name shall be imprinted now.'

Camilla parts from her husband's embrace:—

'My name is one I do not fear;
'Tis one that thou wouldst shrink to hear.
Go, cool thy penitential fires,
Thou creature, foul with base desires!'

CAMILLO (*facing Count Orso*).

'The choice is thine!'

COUNT ORSO (*draws*).

'The choice is made!'

CHORUS (*narrowing its circle*).

'Familiar is that naked blade.
Of others, of himself, the fate—
How swift 'tis Provocation's mate!'

MICHIELLA (*torn with jealous rage*).

'Yea; I could smite her on the face.
Father, first read the thing's disgrace.
I grudge them honourable death.
Put poison in their latest breath!'

ORSO (*his left arm extended*).

'You twain are sundered: hear with awe
The judgement of the Source of Law.'

CAMILLA (*smiling confidently*).

'Not such, when I was at the Source,
It said to me;—but take thy course.'

ORSO (*astounded*).

'Thither thy steps were bent?'

MICHIELLA (*spurning verbal controversy*).

'She feigns!
A thousand swords are in my veins.
Friends! soldiers! strike them down, the pair!'

CAMILLO (*on guard, clasping his wife*).

''Tis well! I cry, to all we share.
Yea, life or death, 'tis well! 'tis well!'

MICHIELLA (*stamps her foot*).

'My heart 's a vessel tossed on hell!'

LEONARDO (*aside*).

'Not in glad nuptials ends the day.'

ORSO (*to Camilla*).

'What is thy purpose with us?—say!'

CAMILLA (*lowly*).

'Unto my Father I have crossed
For tidings of my Mother lost.'

ORSO.

'Thy mother dead!'

CAMILLA.

'She lives!'

MICHIELLA.

'Thou liest!
The tablets of the tomb defiest!
The Fates denounce, the Furies chase
The wretch who lies in Reason's face.'

CAMILLA.

'Fly, then; for we are match'd to try
Which is the idiot, thou or I.'

MICHIELLA.

'Graceless Camilla!'

ORSO.

'Senseless girl!
I cherished thee a precious pearl,
And almost owned thee child of mine.'

CAMILLA.

'Thou kept'st me like a gem, to shine,
Careless that I of blood am made;
No longer be the end delay'd.
'Tis time to prove I have a heart—
Forth from these walls of mine depart!
The ghosts within them are disturb'd:
Go forth, and let thy wrath be curb'd,
For I am strong: Camillo's truth
Has arm'd the visions of our youth.

Our union by the Head Supreme
Is blest : our severance was the dream.
We who have drunk of blood and tears,
Knew nothing of a mortal's fears.
Life is as Death until the strife
In our just cause makes Death as Life.'

ORSO.

' 'Tis madness ? '

LEONARDO.

' Is it madness ? '

CAMILLA.

' Men !

'Tis Reason, but beyond your ken.
There lives a light that none can view
Whose thoughts are brutish :—seen by few,
The few have therefore light divine :
Their visions are God's legions !—sign,
I give you ; for we stand alone,
And you are frozen to the bone.
Your palsied hands refuse their swords.
A sharper edge is in my words,
A deadlier wound is in my cry.
Yea, tho' you slay us, do we die ?
In forcing us to bear the worst,
You made of us Immortals first.
Away ! and trouble not my sight.'

Chorus of Cavaliers : RUDOLFO, ROMUALDO, ARNOLDO, *and others.*

' She moves us with an angel's might.
What if his host outnumber ours !
'Tis heaven that gives victorious powers.'

[*They draw their steel.* ORSO, *simulating gratitude for their devotion to him, addresses them as to pacify their friendly ardour.*]

MICHIELLA *to* LEONARDO (*supplicating*).

'Ever my friend! shall I appeal
In vain to see thy flashing steel?'

LEONARDO (*finally resolved*).

'Traitress! pray, rather, it may rest,
Or its first home will be thy breast.'

Chorus of Bridal Company.

'The flowers from bright Aurora's head
We pluck'd to strew a happy bed,
Shall they be dipp'd in blood ere night?
Woe to the nuptials! woe the sight!'

Rudolfo, Romualdo, Arnoldo, and the others, advance toward Camillo. Michiella calls to them encouragingly that it were well for the deed to be done by their hands. They bid Camillo to direct their lifted swords upon his enemies. Leonardo joins them. Count Orso, after a burst of upbraidings, accepts Camillo's offer of peace, and gives his bond to quit the castle. Michiella, gazing savagely at Camilla, entreats her for an utterance of her triumphant scorn. She assures Camilla that she knows her feelings accurately.

'Now you think that I am overwhelmed; that I shall have a restless night, and lie, after all my crying 's over, with my hair spread out on my pillow, on either side my face, like green moss of a withered waterfall: you think you will bestow a little serpent of a gift from my stolen treasures to comfort me. You will comfort me with a lock of Camillo's hair, that I may have it on my breast to-night, and dream, and wail, and writhe, and curse the air I breathe, and clasp the abominable emptiness like a thousand Camillos. Speak!'

The dagger is seen gleaming up Michiella's wrist; she steps on in a bony triangle, faced for mischief: a savage

Hunnish woman, with the hair of a Goddess—the figure of a cat taking to its forepaws. Close upon Camilla she towers in her whole height, and crying thrice, swift as the assassin trebles his blow, 'Speak,' to Camilla, who is fronting her mildly, she raises her arm, and the stilet flashes into Camilla's bosom.

'Die then, and outrage me no more.'

Camilla staggers to her husband. Camillo receives her falling. Michiella, seized by Leonardo, presents a stiffened shape of vengeance with fierce white eyes and dagger aloft. There are many shouts, and there is silence.

CAMILLA, *supported by* CAMILLO.

'If this is death, it is not hard to bear.
Your handkerchief drinks up my blood so fast
It seems to love it. Threads of my own hair
Are woven in it. 'Tis the one I cast
That midnight from my window, when you stood
Alone, and heaven seemed to love you so!
I did not think to wet it with my blood
When next I tossed it to my love below.'

CAMILLO (*cherishing her*).

'Camilla, pity! say you will not die.
Your voice is like a soul lost in the sky.'

CAMILLA.

'I know not if my soul has flown; I know
My body is a weight I cannot raise:
My voice between them issues, and I go
Upon a journey of uncounted days.
Forgetfulness is like a closing sea;
But you are very bright above me still.
My life I give as it was given to me:
I enter on a darkness wide and chill.'

CAMILLO.

'O noble heart! a million fires consume
The hateful hand that sends you to your doom.'

CAMILLA.

'There is an end to joy: there is no end
To striving; therefore ever let us strive
In purity that shall the toil befriend,
And keep our poor mortality alive.
I hang upon the boundaries like light
Along the hills when downward goes the day;
I feel the silent creeping up of night.
For you, my husband, lies a flaming way.'

CAMILLO.

'I lose your eyes: I lose your voice: 'tis faint.
Ah, Christ! see the fallen eyelids of a saint.'

CAMILLA.

'Our life is but a little holding, lent
To do a mighty labour: we are one
With heaven and the stars when it is spent
To serve God's aim: else die we with the sun.'

She sinks. Camillo droops his head above her.

The house was hushed as at a veritable death-scene. It was more like a cathedral service than an operatic pageant. Agostino had done his best to put the heart of the creed of his Chief into these last verses. Rocco's music floated them in solemn measures, and Vittoria had been careful to articulate throughout the sacred monotony so that their full meaning should be taken.

In the printed book of the libretto a chorus of cavaliers, followed by one harmless verse of Camilla's adieux to them, and to her husband and life, concluded the opera.

'Let her stop at that—it 's enough!—and she shall be untouched,' said General Pierson to Antonio-Pericles.

'I have information, as you know, that an extremely impudent song is coming.'

The General saw Wilfrid hanging about the lobby, in flagrant disobedience to orders. Rebuking his nephew with a frown, he commanded the lieutenant to make his way round to the stage and see that the curtain was dropped according to the printed book.

'Off, mon Dieu! off!' Pericles speeded him; adding in English, 'Shall she taste prison-damp, zat voice is killed.'

The chorus of cavaliers was a lamentation: the key-note being despair: ordinary libretto verses.

Camilla's eyes unclose. She struggles to be lifted, and, raised on Camilla's arm, she sings as if with the last pulsation of her voice, softly resonant in its rich contralto. She pardons Michiella. She tells Count Orso that when he has extinguished his appetite for dominion, he will enjoy an unknown pleasure in the friendship of his neighbours. Repeating that her mother lives, and will some day kneel by her daughter's grave—not mournfully, but in beatitude—she utters her adieu to all.

At the moment of her doing so, Montini whispered in Vittoria's ear. She looked up and beheld the downward curl of the curtain. There was confusion at the wings: Croats were visible to the audience. Carlo Ammiani and Luciano Romara jumped on the stage; a dozen of the noble youths of Milan streamed across the boards to either wing, and caught the curtain descending. The whole house had risen insurgent with cries of 'Vittoria.' The curtain-ropes were in the hands of the Croats, but Carlo, Luciano, and their fellows held the curtain aloft at arm's length at each side of her. She was seen, and she sang, and the house listened.

The Italians present, one and all, rose up reverently and murmured the refrain. Many of the aristocracy

would, doubtless, have preferred that this public declaration of the plain enigma should not have rung forth to carry them on the popular current; and some might have sympathized with the insane grin which distorted the features of Antonio-Pericles, when he beheld illusion wantonly destroyed, and the opera reduced to be a mere vehicle for a fulmination of politics. But the general enthusiasm was too tremendous to permit of individual protestations. To sit, when the nation was standing, was to be a German. Nor, indeed, was there an Italian in the house who would willingly have consented to see Vittoria silenced, now that she had chosen to defy the Tedeschi from the boards of La Scala. The fascination of her voice extended even over the German division of the audience. They, with the Italians, said: 'Hear her! hear her!' The curtain was agitated at the wings, but in the centre it was kept above Vittoria's head by the uplifted arms of the twelve young men :—

'I cannot count the years,
That you will drink, like me,
The cup of blood and tears,
Ere she to you appears :—
Italia, Italia shall be free!'

So the great name was out, and its enemies had heard it.

'You dedicate your lives
To her, and you will be
The food on which she thrives,
Till her great day arrives :—
Italia, Italia shall be free!

'She asks you but for faith!
Your faith in her takes she
As draughts of heaven's breath,
Amid defeat and death :—
Italia, Italia shall be free!'

The prima donna was not acting exhaustion when sinking lower in Montini's arms. Her bosom rose and sank quickly, and she gave the terminating verse :—

'I enter the black boat
Upon the wide grey sea,
Where all her set suns float ;
Thence hear my voice remote :—
Italia, Italia shall be free !'

The curtain dropped.

CHAPTER XXII

WILFRID COMES FORWARD

An order for the immediate arrest of Vittoria was brought round to the stage at the fall of the curtain by Captain Weisspriess, and delivered by him on the stage to the officer commanding, a pothered lieutenant of Croats, whose first proceeding was dictated by the military instinct to get his men in line, and who was utterly devoid of any subsequent idea. The thunder of the house on the other side of the curtain was enough to disconcert a youngster such as he was ; nor have the subalterns of Croat regiments a very signal reputation for efficiency in the Austrian service. Vittoria stood among her supporters apart ; pale, and 'only very thirsty,' as she told the enthusiastic youths who pressed near her, and implored her to have no fear. Carlo was on her right hand ; Luciano on her left. They kept her from going off to her room. Montini was despatched to fetch her maid Giacinta with cloak and hood for her mistress. The young lieutenant of Croats drew his sword, but hesitated. Weisspriess, Wilfrid, and Major de Pyrmont were at one

wing, between the Italian gentlemen and the soldiery. The operatic company had fallen into the background, or stood crowding the side places of exit. Vittoria's name was being shouted with that angry, sea-like, horrid monotony of iteration which is more suggestive of menacing impatience and the positive will of the people, than varied, sharp, imperative calls. The people had got the lion in their throats. One shriek from her would bring them, like a torrent, on the boards, as the officers well knew ; and every second's delay in executing the orders of the General added to the difficulty of their position. The lieutenant of Croats strode up to Weisspriess and Wilfrid, who were discussing a plan of action vehemently ; while, amid hubbub and argument, De Pyrmont studied Vittoria's features through his opera-glass, with an admirable simple languor.

Wilfrid turned back to him, and De Pyrmont, without altering the level of his glass, said, 'She 's as cool as a lemon-ice. That girl will be a mother of heroes. To have volcanic fire and the mastery of her nerves at the same time, is something prodigious. She is magnificent. Take a peep at her. I suspect that the rascal at her right is seizing his occasion to plant a trifle or so in her memory —the animal ! It 's just the moment, and he knows it.'

De Pyrmont looked at Wilfrid's face.

'Have I hit you anywhere accidentally ? ' he asked, for the face had grown dead-white.

'Be my friend, for heaven's sake ! ' was the choking answer. 'Save her ! Get her away ! She is an old acquaintance of mine—of mine, in England. Do ; or I shall have to break my sword.'

'You know her ? and you don't go over to her ? ' said De Pyrmont.

'I—yes, she knows me.'

'Then, why not present yourself ? '

'Get her away. Talk Weisspriess down. He is for seizing her at all hazards. It 's madness to provoke a conflict. Just listen to the house! I may be broken, but save her I will. De Pyrmont, on my honour, I will stand by you for ever if you will help me to get her away.'

'To suggest my need in the hour of your own is not a bad notion,' said the cool Frenchman. 'What plan have you?'

Wilfrid struck his forehead miserably.

'Stop Lieutenant Zettlisch. Don't let him go up to her. Don't——'

De Pyrmont beheld in astonishment that a speechlessness such as affects condemned wretches in the supreme last minutes of existence had come upon the Englishman.

'I 'm afraid yours is a bad case,' he said; 'and the worst of it is, it 's just the case women have no compassion for. Here comes a parlementaire from the opposite camp. Let 's hear him.'

It was Luciano Romara. He stood before them to request that the curtain should be raised. The officers debated together, and deemed it prudent to yield consent.

Luciano stipulated further that the soldiers were to be withdrawn.

'On one wing, or on both wings?' said Captain Weisspriess, twinkling eyes oblique.

'Out of the house,' said Luciano.

The officers laughed.

'You must confess,' said De Pyrmont, affably, 'that though the drum does issue command to the horse, it scarcely thinks of doing so after a rent in the skin has shown its emptiness. Can you suppose that we are likely to run when we see you empty-handed? These things are matters of calculation.'

'It is for you to calculate correctly,' said Luciano.

As he spoke, a first surge of the exasperated house broke upon the stage and smote the curtain, which burst into white zigzags, as it were a breast stricken with panic.

Giacinta came running in to her mistress, and cloaked and hooded her hurriedly.

Enamoured, impassioned, Ammiani murmured in Vittoria's ear: 'My own soul!'

She replied: 'My lover!'

So their first love-speech was interchanged with Italian simplicity, and made a divine circle about them in the storm.

Luciano returned to his party to inform them that they held the key of the emergency.

'Stick fast,' he said. 'None of you move. Whoever takes the first step takes the false step; I see that.'

'We have no arms, Luciano.'

'We have the people behind us.'

There was a fiercer tempest in the body of the house, and, on a sudden, silence. Men who had invaded the stage joined the Italian guard surrounding Vittoria, telling that the lights had been extinguished; and then came the muffled uproar of universal confusion. Some were for handing her down into the orchestra, and getting her out through the general vomitorium, but Carlo and Luciano held her firmly by them. The theatre was a rageing darkness; and there was barely a light on the stage. 'Santa Maria!' cried Giacinta, 'how dreadful that steel does look in the dark! I wish our sweet boys would cry louder.' Her mistress, almost laughing, bade her keep close, and be still. 'Oh! this must be like being at sea,' the poor creature whined, stopping her ears and shutting her eyes. Vittoria was in a thick gathering of her defenders; she could just hear that a parley was going on between Luciano and the Austrians. Luciano

made his way back to her. 'Quick!' he said; 'nothing cows a mob like darkness. One of these officers tells me he knows you, and gives his word of honour—he 's an Englishman—to conduct you out: come.'

Vittoria placed her hands in Carlo's one instant. Luciano cleared a space for them. She heard a low English voice.

'You do not recognize me? There is no time to lose. You had another name once, and I have had the honour to call you by it.'

'Are you an Austrian?' she exclaimed, and Carlo felt that she was shrinking back.

'I am the Wilfrid Pole whom you knew. You are entrusted to my charge; I have sworn to conduct you to the doors in safety, whatever it may cost me.'

Vittoria looked at him mournfully. Her eyes filled with tears. 'The night is spoiled for me!' she murmured.

'Emilia!'

'That is not my name.'

'I know you by no other. Have mercy on me. I would do anything in the world to serve you.'

Major de Pyrmont came up to him and touched his arm. He said briefly: 'We shall have a collision, to a certainty, unless the people hear from one of her set that she is out of the house.'

Wilfrid requested her to confide her hand to him.

'My hand is engaged,' she said.

Bowing ceremoniously, Wilfrid passed on, and Vittoria, with Carlo and Luciano and her maid Giacinta, followed between files of bayonets through the dusky passages, and downstairs into the night air.

Vittoria spoke in Carlo's ear: 'I have been unkind to him. I had a great affection for him in England.'

'Thank him; thank him,' said Carlo.

She quitted her lover's side and went up to Wilfrid with

a shyly extended hand. A carriage was drawn up by the kerbstone; the doors of it were open. She had barely made a word intelligible, when Major de Pyrmont pointed to some officers approaching. 'Get her out of the way while there 's time,' he said in French to Luciano. 'This is her carriage. Swiftly, gentlemen, or she 's lost.'

Giacinta read his meaning by signs, and caught her mistress by the sleeve, using force. She and Major de Pyrmont placed Vittoria, bewildered, in the carriage; De Pyrmont shut the door, and signalled to the coachman. Vittoria thrust her head out for a last look at her lover, and beheld him with the arms of dark-clothed men upon him. La Scala was pouring forth its occupants in struggling roaring shoals from every door. Her outcry returned to her deadened in the rapid rolling of the carriage across the lighted Piazza. Giacinta had to hold her down with all her might. Great clamour was for one moment heard by them, and then a rushing voicelessness. Giacinta screamed to the coachman till she was exhausted. Vittoria sank shuddering on the lap of her maid, hiding her face that she might plunge out of recollection.

The lightnings shot across her brain, but wrote no legible thing; the scenes of the opera lost their outlines as in a white heat of fire. She tried to weep, and vainly asked her heart for tears, that this dry dreadful blind misery of mere sensation might be washed out of her, and leave her mind clear to grapple with evil; and then, as the lurid breaks come in a storm-driven night sky, she had the picture of her lover in the hands of enemies, and of Wilfrid in the white uniform; the torment of her living passion, the mockery of her passion by-gone. Recollection, when it came back, overwhelmed her; she swayed from recollection to oblivion, and was like a caged wild thing. Giacinta had to be as a mother with

her. The poor trembling girl, who had begun to perceive that the carriage was bearing them to some unknown destination, tore open the bands of her corset and drew her mistress's head against the full warmth of her bosom, rocked her, and moaned over her, mixing comfort and lamentation in one offering, and so contrived to draw the tears out from her,—a storm of tears; not fitfully hysterical, but tears that poured a black veil over the eyeballs, and fell steadily streaming. Once subdued by the weakness, Vittoria's nature melted; she shook piteously with weeping; she remembered Laura's words, and thought of what she had done, in terror and remorse, and tried to ask if the people would be fighting now, but could not. Laura seemed to stand before her like a Fury stretching her finger at the dear brave men whom she had hurled upon the bayonets and the guns. It was an unendurable anguish. Giacinta was compelled to let her cry, and had to reflect upon their present situation unaided. They had passed the city gates. Voices on the coachman's box had given German pass-words. She would have screamed then had not the carriage seemed to her a sanctuary from such creatures as foreign soldiers, whitecoats; so she cowered on. They were in the starry open country, on the high-road between the vine-hung mulberry trees. She held the precious head of her mistress, praying the Saints that strength would soon come to her to talk of their plight, or chatter a little comfortingly at least; and but for the singular sweetness which it shot thrilling to her woman's heart, she would have been fretted when Vittoria, after one long-drawn wavering sob, turned her lips to the bared warm breast, and put a little kiss upon it, and slept.

CHAPTER XXIII

FIRST HOURS OF THE FLIGHT

VITTORIA slept on like an outworn child, while Giacinta nodded over her, and started, and wondered what embowelled mountain they might be passing through, so cold was the air and thick the darkness; and wondered more at the old face of dawn, which appeared to know nothing of her agitation. But morning was better than night, and she ceased counting over her sins forward and backward; adding comments on them, excusing some and admitting the turpitude of others, with 'Oh! I was naughty, padre mio! I was naughty':—she huddled them all into one of memory's spare sacks, and tied the neck of it, that they should keep safe for her father-confessor. At such times, after a tumult of the blood, women have tender delight in one another's beauty. Giacinta doted on the marble cheek, upturned on her lap, with the black unbound locks slipping across it; the braid of the coronal of hair loosening; the chance flitting movement of the pearly little dimple that lay at the edge of the bow of the joined lips, like the cradling hollow of a dream. At whiles it would twitch; yet the dear eyelids continued sealed.

Looking at shut eyelids when you love the eyes beneath, is more or less a teazing mystery that draws down your mouth to kiss them. Their lashes seem to answer you in some way with infantine provocation; and fine eyelashes upon a face bent sideways, suggest a kind of internal smiling. Giacinta looked till she could bear it no longer; she kissed the cheek, and crooned over it, gladdened by a sense of jealous possession when she thought of the

adored thing her mistress had been overnight. One of her hugs awoke Vittoria, who said, 'Shut my window, mother,' and slept again fast. Giacinta saw that they were nearer to the mountains. Mountain-shadows were thrown out, and long lank shadows of cypresses that climbed up reddish-yellow undulations, told of the sun coming. The sun threw a blaze of light into the carriage. He shone like a good friend, and helped Giacinta think, as she had already been disposed to imagine, that the machinery by which they had been caught out of Milan was amicable magic after all, and not to be screamed at. The sound medicine of sleep and sunlight was restoring livelier colour to her mistress. Giacinta hushed her now, but Vittoria's eyes opened, and settled on her, full of repose.

'What are you thinking about?' she asked.

'Signorina, my own, I was thinking whether those people I see on the hill-sides are as fond of coffee as I am.'

Vittoria sat up and tumbled questions out headlong, pressing her eyes and gathering her senses; she shook with a few convulsions, but shed no tears. It was rather the discomfort of their position than any vestige of alarm which prompted Giacinta to project her head and interrogate the coachman and chasseur. She drew back, saying, 'Holy Virgin! they are Germans. We are to stop in half-an-hour.' With that she put her hands to use in arranging and smoothing Vittoria's hair and dress—the dress of *Camilla*—of which triumphant heroine Vittoria felt herself an odd little ghost now. She changed her seat that she might look back on Milan. A letter was spied fastened with a pin to one of the cushions. She opened it, and read in pencil writing:—

'Go quietly. You have done all that you could do for good or for ill. The carriage will take you to a safe place, where you will soon see your friends and hear

the news. Wait till you reach Meran. You will see a friend from England. Avoid the lion's jaw a second time. Here you compromise everybody. Submit, or your friends will take you for a mad girl. Be satisfied. *It is an Austrian who rescues you.* Think yourself no longer appointed to put match to powder. Drown yourself if a second frenzy comes. I feel I could still love your body if the obstinate soul were out of it. You know who it is that writes. I might sign " Michiella " to this : I have a sympathy with her anger at the provoking Camilla. Addio ! From La Scala.'

The lines read as if Laura were uttering them. Wrapping her cloak across the silken opera garb, Vittoria leaned back passively until the carriage stopped at a village inn, where Giacinta made speedy arrangements to satisfy as far as possible her mistress's queer predilection for bathing her whole person daily in cold water. The household service of the inn recovered from the effort to assist her sufficiently to produce hot coffee and sweet bread, and new green-streaked stracchino, the cheese of the district, which was the morning meal of the fugitives. Giacinta, who had never been so thirsty in her life, became intemperately refreshed, and was seized by the fatal desire to do something : to do what she could not tell ; but chancing to see that her mistress had silken slippers on her feet, she protested loudly that stouter foot-gear should be obtained for her, and ran out to circulate inquiries concerning a shoemaker who might have a pair of country overshoes for sale. She returned to say that the coachman and his comrade, the German chasseur, were drinking and watering their horses, and were not going to start until after a rest of two hours, and that she proposed to walk to a small Bergamasc town within a couple of miles of the village, where the shoes could be obtained, and perhaps a stuff to replace the silken

dress. Receiving consent, Giacinta whispered, 'A man outside wishes to speak to you, signorina. Don't be frightened. He pounced on me at the end of the village, and had as little breath to speak as a boy in love. He was behind us all last night on the carriage. He mentioned you by name. He is quite commonly dressed, but he 's a gallant gentleman, and exactly like our signor Carlo. My dearest lady, he 'll be company for you while I am absent. May I beckon him to come into the room?'

Vittoria supposed at once that this was a smoothing of the way for the entrance of her lover and her joy. She stood up, letting all her strength go that he might the more justly take her and cherish her. But it was not Carlo who entered. So dead fell her broken hope that her face was repellent with the effort she made to support herself. He said, 'I address the signorina Vittoria. I am a relative of Countess Ammiani. My name is Angelo Guidascarpi. Last night I was evading the sbirri in this disguise by the private door of La Scala, from which I expected Carlo to come forth. I saw him seized in mistake for me. I jumped up on the empty box-seat behind your carriage. Before we entered the village I let myself down. If I am seen and recognized, I am lost, and great evil will befall Countess Ammiani and her son · but if they are unable to confront Carlo and me, my escape ensures his safety.'

'What can I do?' said Vittoria.

He replied, 'Shall I answer you by telling you what I have done?'

'You need not, signore.'

'Enough that I want to keep a sword fresh for my country. I am at your mercy, signorina; and I am without anxiety. I heard the chasseur saying at the door of La Scala that he had the night-pass for the city gates and orders for the Tyrol. Once in Tyrol I leap into

Switzerland. I should have remained in Milan, but nothing will be done there yet, and quiet cities are not homes for me.'

Vittoria began to admit the existence of his likeness to her lover, though it seemed to her a guilty weakness that she should see it.

'*Will* nothing be done in Milan?' was her first eager question.

'Nothing, signorina, or I should be there, and safe.'

'What, signore, do you require me to help you in?'

'Say that I am your servant.'

'And take you with me?'

'Such is my petition.'

'Is the case very urgent?'

'Hardly more, as regards myself, than a sword lost to Italy if I am discovered. But, signorina, from what Countess Ammiani has told me, I believe that you will some day be *my* relative likewise. Therefore I appeal not only to a charitable lady, but to one of my own family.'

Vittoria reddened. 'All that I can do I will do.'

Angelo had to assure her that Carlo's release was certain the moment his identity was established. She breathed gladly, saying, 'I wonder at it all very much. I do not know where they are carrying me, but I think I am in friendly hands. I owe you a duty. You will permit me to call you Beppo till our journey ends.'

They were attracted to the windows by a noise of a horseman drawing rein under it, whose imperious shout for the innkeeper betrayed the soldier's habit of exacting prompt obedience from civilians, though there was no military character in his attire. The innkeeper and his wife came out to the summons, and then both made way for the chasseur in attendance on Vittoria. With this man the cavalier conversed.

'Have you had food?' said Vittoria. 'I have some money that will serve for both of us three days. Go, and eat and drink. Pay for us both.'

She gave him her purse. He received it with a grave servitorial bow, and retired.

Soon after the chasseur brought up a message. Herr Johannes requested that he might have the honour of presenting his homage to her: it was imperative that he should see her. She nodded. Her first glance at Herr Johannes assured her of his being one of the officers whom she had seen on the stage last night, and she prepared to act her part. Herr Johannes desired her to recall to mind his introduction to her by the Signor Antonio-Pericles at the house of the maestro Rocco Ricci. 'It is true; pardon me,' said Vittoria.

He informed her that she had surpassed herself at the opera; so much so that he and many other Germans had been completely conquered by her. Hearing, he said, that she was to be pursued, he took horse and galloped all night on the road toward Schloss Sonnenberg, whither, as it had been whispered to him, she was flying, in order to counsel her to lie *perdu* for a short space, and subsequently to conduct her to the schloss of the amiable duchess. Vittoria thanked him, but stated humbly that she preferred to travel alone. He declared that it was impossible: that she was precious to the world of Art, and must on no account be allowed to run into peril. Vittoria tried to assert her will; she found it unstrung. She thought besides that this disguised officer, with the ill-looking eyes running into one, might easily, since he had heard her, be a devotee of her voice; and it flattered her yet more to imagine him as a capture from the enemy —a vanquished subservient Austrian. She had seen him come on horseback; he had evidently followed her; and he knew what she now understood must be her destination.

Moreover, Laura had underlined '*it is an Austrian who rescues you.*' This man perchance was the Austrian. His precise manner of speech demanded an extreme repugnance, if it was to be resisted; Vittoria's reliance upon her own natural fortitude was much too secure for her to encourage the physical revulsions which certain hard faces of men create in the hearts of young women.

'Was all quiet in Milan?' she asked.

'Quiet as a pillow,' he said.

'And will continue to be?'

'Not a doubt of it.'

'Why is there not a doubt of it, signore?'

'You beat us Germans on one field. On the other you have no chance. But you must lose no time. The Croats are on your track. I have ordered out the carriage.'

The mention of the Croats struck her fugitive senses with a panic.

'I must wait for my maid,' she said, attempting to deliberate.

'Ha! you have a maid: of course you have! Where is your maid?'

'She ought to have returned by this time. If not, she is on the road.'

'On the road? Good; we will pick up the maid on the road. We have not a minute to spare. Lady, I am your obsequious servant. Hasten out, I beg of you. I was taught at my school that minutes are not to be wasted. Those Croats have been drinking and what not on the way, or they would have been here before this. You can't rely on Italian innkeepers to conceal you.'

'Signore, are you a man of honour?'

'Illustrious lady, I am.'

She listened simply to the response without giving heed to the prodigality of gesture. The necessity for flight now that Milan was announced as lying quiet, had

become her sole thought. Angelo was standing by the carriage.

'What man is this?' said Herr Johannes, frowning.

'He is my servant,' said Vittoria.

'My dear good lady, you told me your servant was a maid. This will never do. We can't have him.'

'Excuse me, signore, I never travel without him.'

'Travel! This is not a case of travelling, but running; and when you run, if you are in earnest about it, you must fling away your baggage and arms.'

Herr Johannes tossed out his moustache to right and left, and stamped his foot. He insisted that the man should be left behind.

'Off, sir! back to Milan, or elsewhere,' he cried.

'Beppo, mount on the box,' said Vittoria.

Her command was instantly obeyed. Herr Johannes looked her in the face. 'You are very decided, my dear lady.' He seemed to have lost his own decision, but handing Vittoria in, he drew a long cigar from his breast-pocket, lit it, and mounted beside the coachman. The chasseur had disappeared.

Vittoria entreated that a general look-out should be kept for Giacinta. The road was straight up an ascent, and she had no fear that her maid would not be seen. Presently there was a view of the violet domes of a city. 'Is it Bergamo?—is it Brescia?' she longed to ask, thinking of her Bergamasc and Brescian friends, and of those two places famous for the bravery of their sons: one being especially dear to her, as the birthplace of a genius of melody, whose blood was in her veins. 'Did he look on these mulberry trees?—did he look on these green-grassed valleys?—did he hear these falling waters?' she asked herself, and closed her spirit with reverential thoughts of him and with his music. She saw sadly that they were turning from the city. A little ball of paper

was shot into her lap. She opened it and read: 'An officer of the cavalry.—Beppo.' She put her hand out of the window to signify that she was awake to the situation. Her anxiety, however, began to fret. No sight of Giacinta was to be had in any direction. Her mistress commenced chiding the absent garrulous creature, and did so until she pitied her, when she accused herself of cowardice, for she was incapable of calling out to the coachman to stop. The rapid motion subdued such energy as remained to her, and she willingly allowed her hurried feelings to rest on the faces of rocks impending over long ravines, and of perched old castles and white villas and sub-Alpine herds. She burst from the fascination as from a dream, but only to fall into it again, reproaching her weakness, and saying, 'What a thing am I!' When she did make her voice heard by Herr Johannes and the coachman, she was nervous and ashamed, and met the equivocating pacification of the reply with an assent half-way, though she was far from comprehending the consolation she supposed that it was meant to convey. She put out her hand to communicate with Beppo. Another ball of pencilled writing answered to it. She read: 'Keep watch on this Austrian. Your maid is two hours in the rear. Refuse to be separated from me. My life is at your service.—Beppo.'

Vittoria made her final effort to get a resolve of some sort; ending it with a compassionate exclamation over poor Giacinta. The girl could soon find her way back to Milan. On the other hand, the farther from Milan, the less the danger to Carlo's relative, in whom she now perceived a stronger likeness to her lover. She sank back in the carriage and closed her eyes. Though she smiled at the vanity of forcing sleep in this way, sleep came. Her healthy frame seized its natural medicine to rebuild her after the fever of recent days.

She slept till the rocks were purple, and rose-purple mists were in the valleys. The stopping of the carriage aroused her. They were at the threshold of a large wayside hostelry, fronting a slope of forest and a plunging brook. Whitecoats in all attitudes leaned about the door; she beheld the inner court full of them. Herr Johannes was ready to hand her to the ground. He said: 'You have nothing to fear. These fellows are on the march to Cremona. Perhaps it will be better if you are served up in your chamber. You will be called early in the morning.'

She thanked him, and felt grateful. 'Beppo, look to yourself,' she said, and ran to her retirement.

'I fancy that 's about all that you are fit for,' Herr Johannes remarked, with his eyes on the impersonator of Beppo, who bore the scrutiny carelessly, and after seeing that Vittoria had left nothing on the carriage-seats, directed his steps to the kitchen, as became his functions. Herr Johannes beckoned to a Tyrolese maid-servant, of whom Beppo had asked his way. She gave her name as Kätchen.

'Kätchen, Kätchen, my sweet chuck,' said Herr Johannes, 'here are ten florins for you, in silver, if you will get me the handkerchief of that man: you have just stretched your finger out for him.'

According to the common Austrian reckoning of them, Herr Johannes had adopted the right method for ensuring the devotion of the maidens of Tyrol. She responded with an amazed gulp of her mouth and a grimace of acquiescence. Ten florins in silver shortened the migratory term of the mountain girl by full three months. Herr Johannes asked her the hour when the officers in command had supper, and deferred his own meal till that time. Kätchen set about earning her money. With any common Beppo it would have been easy enough—

simple barter for a harmless kiss. But this Beppo appeared inaccessible ; he was so courtly and so reserved ; nor is a maiden of Tyrol a particularly skilled seductress. The supper of the officers was smoking on the table when Herr Johannes presented himself among them, and very soon the inn was shaken with an uproar of greeting. Kätchen found Beppo listening at the door of the salle. She clapped her hands upon him to drag him away.

'What right have you to be leaning your head there ?' she said, and threatened to make his proceedings known. Beppo had no jewel to give, little money to spare. He had just heard Herr Johannes welcomed among the officers by a name that half paralyzed him. 'You shall have anything you ask of me if you will find me out in a couple of hours,' he said. Kätchen nodded truce for that period, and saw her home in the Oberinnthal still nearer—twelve mountain goats and a cow her undisputed property. She found him out, though he had strayed through the court of the inn, and down a hanging garden to the borders of a torrent that drenched the air and sounded awfully in the dark ravine below. He embraced her very mildly. 'One scream and you go,' he said ; she felt the saving hold of her feet plucked from her, with all the sinking horror, and bit her under lip, as if keeping in the scream with bare stitches. When he released her she was perfectly mastered. 'You do play tricks,' she said, and quaked.

'I play no tricks. Tell me at what hour these soldiers march.'

'At two in the morning.'

'Don't be afraid, silly child : you 're safe if you obey me. At what time has our carriage been ordered ?'

'At four.'

'Now swear to do this :—rouse my mistress at a quarter past two : bring her down to me.'

'Yes, yes,' said Kätchen, eagerly: 'give me your handkerchief, and she will follow me. I do swear; that I do; by big St. Christopher! who 's painted on the walls of our house at home.'

Beppo handed her sweet silver, which played a lively tune for her temporarily-vanished cow and goats. Peering at her features in the starlight, he let her take the handkerchief from his pocket.

'Oh! what have you got in there?' she said.

He laid his finger across her mouth, bidding her return to the house.

'Dear heaven!' Kätchen went in murmuring; 'would I have gone out to that soft-looking young man if I had known he was a devil.'

Angelo Guidascarpi was aware that an officer without responsibility never sleeps faster than when his brothers-in-arms have to be obedient to the reveillée. At two in the morning the bugle rang out: many lighted cigars were flashing among the dark passages of the inn; the whitecoats were disposed in marching order; hot coffee was hastily swallowed; the last stragglers from the stables, the outhouses, the court, and the straw beds under roofs of rock, had gathered to the main body. The march set forward. A pair of officers sent a shout up to the drowsy windows, 'Good luck to you, Weisspriess!' Angelo descended from the concealment of the opposite trees, where he had stationed himself to watch the departure. The inn was like a sleeper who has turned over. He made Kätchen bring him bread and slices of meat and a flask of wine, which things found a place in his pockets: and paying for his mistress and himself, he awaited Vittoria's foot on the stairs. When Vittoria came she asked no questions, but said to Kätchen, 'You may kiss me'; and Kätchen began crying; she believed that they were lovers daring everything for love.

'You have a clear start of an hour and a half. Leave the high-road then, and turn left through the forest and ask for Bormio. If you reach Tyrol, and come to Silz, tell people that you know Kätchen Giesslinger, and they will be kind to you.'

So saying, she let them out into the black-eyed starlight.

CHAPTER XXIV

ADVENTURES OF VITTORIA AND ANGELO

NOTHING was distinguishable for the flying couple save the high-road winding under rock and forest, and here and there a coursing water in the depths of the ravines, that showed like a vein in black marble. They walked swiftly, keeping brisk ears for sound of hoof or foot behind them. Angelo promised her that she should rest after the morning light had come; but she assured him that she could bear fatigue, and her firm cheerfulness lent his heart vigour. At times they were hooded with the darkness, which came on them as if, as benighted children fancy, their faces were about to meet the shaggy breast of the forest. Rising up to lighter air, they had sight of distant twinklings: it might be city, or autumn weed, or fires of the woodmen, or beacon fires: they glimmered like eyelets to the mystery of the vast unseen land. Innumerable brooks went talking to the night: torrents in seasons of rain, childish voices now, with endless involutions of a song of three notes and a sort of unnoted clanging chorus, as if a little one sang and would sing on through the thumping of a tambourine and bells. Vittoria had these fancies: Angelo had none. He walked like a hunted man whose life is at stake.

'If we reach a village soon we may get some conveyance,' he said.

'I would rather walk than drive,' said Vittoria; 'it keeps me from thinking.'

'There is the dawn, signorina.'

Vittoria frightened him by taking a seat upon a bench of rock; while it was still dark about them, she drew off Camilla's silken shoes and stockings, and stood on bare feet.

'You fancied I was tired,' she said. 'No, I am thrifty; and I want to save as much of my finery as I can. I can go very well on naked feet. These shoes are no protection; they would be worn out in half-a-day, and spoilt for decent wearing in another hour.'

The sight of fair feet upon hard earth troubled Angelo; he excused himself for calling her out to endure hardship; but she said, 'I trust you entirely.' She looked up at the first thin wave of colour while walking.

'You do not know me,' said he.

'You are the Countess Ammiani's nephew.'

'I have, as I had the honour to tell you yesterday, the blood of your lover in my veins.'

'Do not speak of him now, I pray,' said Vittoria; 'I want my strength.'

'Signorina, the man we have left behind us is his enemy; —mine. I would rather see you dead than alive in his hands. Do you fear death?'

'Sometimes; when I am half awake,' she confessed. 'I dislike thinking of it.'

He asked her curiously: 'Have you never seen it?'

'Death?' said she, and changed a shudder to a smile; 'I died last night.'

Angelo smiled with her. 'I saw you die.'

'It seems a hundred years ago.'

'Or half-a-dozen minutes. The heart counts everything.'

'Was I very much liked by the people, signor Angelo?'

'They love you.'

'I have done them no good.'

'Every possible good. And now, mine is the duty to protect you.'

'And yesterday we were strangers! Signor Angelo, you spoke of sbirri. There is no rising in Bologna. Why are they after you? You look too gentle to give them cause.'

'Do I look gentle? But what I carry is no burden. Who that saw you last night would know you for Camilla? You will hear of my deeds, and judge. We shall soon have men upon the road; you must be hidden. See, there: there are our colours in the sky. Austria cannot wipe them out. Since I was a boy I have always slept in a bed facing East, to keep that truth before my eyes. Black and yellow drop to the earth: green, white, and red mount to heaven. If more of my countrymen saw these meanings!—but they are learning to. My tutor called them Germanisms. If so, I have stolen a jewel from my enemy.'

Vittoria mentioned the Chief.

'Yes,' said Angelo; 'he has taught us to read God's handwriting. I revere him. It 's odd; I always fancy I hear his voice from a dungeon, and seeing him looking at one light. He has a fault: he does not comprehend the feelings of a nobleman. Do you think he has made a convert of our Carlo in that? Never! High blood is ineradicable.'

'I am not of high blood,' said Vittoria.

'Countess Ammiani overlooks it. And besides, low blood may be elevated without the intervention of a miracle. You have a noble heart, signorina. It may be the will of God that you should perpetuate our race. All of us save Carlo Ammiani seem to be falling.'

Vittoria bent her head, distressed by a broad beam of sunlight. The country undulating to the plain lay under them, the great Alps above, and much covert on all sides. They entered a forest pathway, following chance for safety. The dark leafage and low green roofing tasted sweeter to their senses than clear air and sky. Dark woods are homes to fugitives, and here there was soft footing, a surrounding gentleness,—grass, and moss with dead leaves peacefully flat on it. The birds were not timorous, and when a lizard or a snake slipped away from her feet, it was amusing to Vittoria and did not hurt her tenderness to see that they were feared. Threading on beneath the trees, they wound by a valley's incline, where tumbled stones blocked the course of a green water, and filled the lonely place with one onward voice. When the sun stood over the valley they sat beneath a chestnut tree in a semicircle of orange rock to eat the food which Angelo had procured at the inn. He poured out wine for her in the hollow of a stone, deep as an egg-shell, whereat she sipped, smiling at simple contrivances; but no smile crossed the face of Angelo. He ate and drank to sustain his strength, as a weapon is sharpened; and having done, he gathered up what was left, and lay at her feet with his eyes fixed upon an old grey stone. She, too, sat brooding. The endless babble and noise of the water had hardened the sense of its being a life in that solitude. The floating of a hawk overhead scarce had the character of an animated thing. Angelo turned round to look at her, and looking upward as he lay, his sight was smitten by spots of blood upon one of her torn white feet, that was but half-nestled in the folds of her dress. Bending his head down, like a bird beaking at prey, he kissed the foot passionately. Vittoria's eyelids ran up; a chord seemed to snap within her ears: she stole the shamed

foot into concealment, and throbbed, but not fearfully, for Angelo's forehead was on the earth. Clumps of grass, and sharp flint-dust stuck between his fists, which were thrust out stiff on either side of him. She heard him groan heavily. When he raised his face, it was white as madness. Her womanly nature did not shrink from caressing it with a touch of soothing hands.

She chanced to say, 'I am your sister.'

'No, by God! you are not my sister,' cried the young man. 'She died without a stain of blood; a lily from head to foot, and went into the vault so. Our mother will see that. She will kiss the girl in heaven and see that.' He rose, crying louder: 'Are there echoes here?' But his voice beat against the rocks undoubled.

She saw that a frenzy had seized him. He looked with eyes drained of human objects; standing square, with stiff half-dropped arms, and an intense melody of wretchedness in his voice.

'Rinaldo, Rinaldo!' he shouted: 'Clelia!—no answer from man or ghost. She is dead. We two said to her—die! and she died. Therefore she is silent, for the dead have not a word. Oh! Milan, Milan! accursed betraying city! I should have found my work in you if you had kept faith. Now here am I, talking to the strangled throat of this place, and can get no answer. Where am I? The world is hollow:—the miserable shell! They lied. Battle and slaughter they promised me, and enemies like ripe maize for the reaping-hook. I would have had them in thick to my hands. I would have washed my hands at night, and eaten and drunk and slept, and sung again to work in the morning. They promised me a sword and a sea to plunge it in, and our mother Italy to bless me. I would have toiled: I would have done good in my life. I would have bathed my soul in our colours. I would have had our flag about

my body for a winding-sheet, and the fighting angels of God to unroll me. Now here am I, and my own pale mother trying at every turn to get in front of me. Have her away! It 's a ghost, I know. She will be touching the strength out of me. She is not the mother I love and I serve. Go: cherish your daughter, you dead woman!'

Angelo reeled. 'A spot of blood has sent me mad,' he said, and caught for a darkness to cross his sight, and fell and lay flat.

Vittoria looked around her; her courage was needed in that long silence.

She adopted his language: 'Our mother Italy is waiting for us. We must travel on, and not be weary. Angelo, my friend, lend me your help over these stones.'

He rose quietly. She laid her elbow on his hand; thus supported she left a place that seemed to shudder. All the heavy day they walked almost silently; she not daring to probe his anguish with a question; and he calm and vacant as the hour following thunder. But, of her safety by his side she had no longer a doubt. She let him gather weeds and grasses, and bind them across her feet, and perform friendly services, sure that nothing earthly could cause such a mental tempest to recur. The considerate observation which at all seasons belongs to true courage told her that it was not madness afflicting Angelo.

Near nightfall they came upon a forester's hut, where they were welcomed by an old man and a little girl, who gave them milk and black bread, and straw to rest on. Angelo slept in the outer air. When Vittoria awoke she had the fancy that she had taken one long dive downward in a well, and on touching the bottom found her head above the surface. While her surprise was wearing off, she beheld the woodman's little girl at her feet

holding up one end of her cloak, and peeping underneath, overcome by amazement at the flashing richness of the dress of the heroine Camilla. Entering into the state of her mind spontaneously, Vittoria sought to induce the child to kiss her; but quite vainly. The child's reverence for the dress allowed her only to be within reach of the hem of it, so as to delight her curiosity. Vittoria smiled when, as she sat up, the child fell back against the wall; and as she rose to her feet, the child scampered from the room. 'My poor Camilla! you can charm somebody, yet,' she said, limping; her visage like a broken water with the pain of her feet. 'If the bell rings for Camilla now, what sort of an entry will she make?' Vittoria treated her physical weakness and ailments with this spirit of humour. 'They may say that Michiella has bewitched you, my Camilla. I think your voice would sound as if it were dragging its feet after it—just as a stork flies. O my Camilla! don't I wish I could do the same, and be ungraceful and at ease! A moan is married to every note of your treble, my Camilla, like December and May. Keep me from shrieking!'

The pangs shooting from her feet were scarce bearable, but the repression of them helped her to meet Angelo with a freer mind than, after the interval of separation, she would have had. The old woodman was cooking a queer composition of flour and milk sprinkled with salt for them. Angelo cut a stout cloth to encase each of her feet, and bound them in it. He was more cheerful than she had ever seen him, and now first spoke of their destination. His design was to conduct her near to Bormio, there to engage a couple of men in her service who would accompany her to Meran, by the Val di Sole, while he crossed the Stelvio alone, and turning leftward in the Tyrolese valley, tried the passage into Switzerland.

Bormio, if, when they quitted the forest, a conveyance could be obtained, was no more than a short day's distance, according to the old woodman's directions. Vittoria induced the little girl to sit upon her knee, and sang to her, but greatly unspirited the charm of her dress. The sun was rising as they bade adieu to the hut.

About mid-day they quitted the shelter of forest trees and stood on broken ground, without a path to guide them. Vittoria did her best to laugh at her mishaps in walking, and compared herself to a Capuchin pilgrim ; but she was unused to going bareheaded and shoeless, and though she held on bravely, the strong beams of the sun and the stony ways warped her strength. She had to check fancies drawn from Arabian tales, concerning the help sometimes given by genii of the air and enchanted birds, that were so incessant and vivid that she found herself sulking at the loneliness and helplessness of the visible sky, and feared that her brain was losing its hold of things. Angelo led her to a half-shaded hollow, where they finished the remainder of yesterday's meat and wine. She set her eyes upon a gold-green lizard by a stone and slept.

'The quantity of sleep I require is unmeasured,' she said, a minute afterwards, according to her reckoning of time, and expected to see the lizard still by the stone. Angelo was near her ; the sky was full of colours, and the earth of shadows.

'Another day gone ! ' she exclaimed in wonderment, thinking that the days of human creatures had grown to be as rapid and (save toward the one end) as meaningless as the gaspings of a fish on dry land. He told her that he had explored the country as far as he had dared to stray from her. He had seen no habitation along the heights. The vale was too distant for strangers to reach

it before nightfall. 'We can make a little way on,' said Vittoria, and the trouble of walking began again. He entreated her more than once to have no fear. 'What can I fear?' she asked. His voice sank penitently: 'You can rely on me fully when there is anything to do for you.'

'I am sure of that,' she replied, knowing his allusion to be to his frenzy of yesterday. In truth, no woman could have had a gentler companion.

On the topmost ridge of the heights, looking over an interminable gulf of darkness they saw the lights of the vale. 'A bird might find his perch there, but I think there is no chance for us,' said Vittoria. 'The moment we move forward to them the lights will fly back. It is their way of behaving.'

Angelo glanced round desperately. Farther on along the ridge his eye caught sight of a low smouldering fire. When he reached it he had a great disappointment. A fire in the darkness gives hopes that men will be at hand. Here there was not any human society. The fire crouched on its ashes. It was on a little circular eminence of mossed rock; black sticks, and brushwood, and dry fern, and split logs, pitchy to the touch, lay about; in the centre of them the fire coiled sullenly among its ashes, with a long eye like a serpent's.

'Could you sleep here?' said Angelo.

'Anywhere!' Vittoria sighed with droll dolefulness.

'I can promise to keep you warm, signorina.'

'I will not ask for more till to-morrow, my friend.'

She laid herself down sideways, curling up her feet, with her cheek on the palm of her hand.

Angelo knelt and coaxed the fire, whose appetite, like that which is said to be ours, was fed by eating, for after the red jaws had taken half-a-dozen sticks, it sang out for more, and sent up flame leaping after flame and

thick smoke. Vittoria watched the scene through a thin division of her eyelids; the fire, the black abyss of country, the stars, and the sentinel figure. She dozed on the edge of sleep, unable to yield herself to it wholly. She believed that she was dreaming when by-and-by many voices filled her ears. The fire was sounding like an angry sea, and the voices were like the shore, more intelligible, but confused in shriller clamour. She was awakened by Angelo, who knelt on one knee and took her outlying hand; then she saw that men surrounded them, some of whom were hurling the lighted logs about, some trampling down the outer rim of flames. They looked devilish to a first awakening glance. He told her that the men were friendly; they were good Italians. This had been the beacon arranged for the night of the Fifteenth, when no run of signals was seen from Milan; and yesterday afternoon it had been in mockery partially consumed. 'We have aroused the country, signorina, and brought these poor fellows out of their beds. They supposed that Milan must be up and at work. I have explained everything to them.'

Vittoria had rather to receive their excuses than to proffer her own. They were mostly youths dressed like the better class of peasantry. They laughed at the incident, stating how glad they would have been to behold the heights all across the lakes ablaze and promising action for the morrow. One square-shouldered fellow raised her lightly from the ground. She felt herself to be a creature for whom circumstance was busily plotting, so that it was useless to exert her mind in thought. The long procession sank down the darkness, leaving the low red fire to die out behind them.

Next morning she awoke in a warm bed, possessed by odd images of flames that stood up like crowing cocks, and cowered like hens above the brood. She was in the

house of one of their new friends, and she could hear Angelo talking in the adjoining room. A conveyance was ready to take her on to Bormio. A woman came to her to tell her this, appearing to have a dull desire to get her gone. She was a draggled woman, with a face of slothful anguish, like one of the inner spectres of a guilty man. She said that her husband was willing to drive the lady to Bormio for a sum that was to be paid at once into his wife's hand ; and little enough it was which poor persons could ever look for from your patriots and disturbers who seduced orderly men from their labour, and made widows and ruined households. This was a new Italian language to Vittoria, and when the woman went on giving instances of households ruined by a husband's vile infatuation about his country, she did not attempt to defend the reckless lord, but dressed quickly that she might leave the house as soon as she could. Her stock of money barely satisfied the woman's demand. The woman seized it, and secreted it in her girdle. When they had passed into the sitting-room, her husband, who was sitting conversing with Angelo, stretched out his hand and knocked the girdle.

'That 's our trick,' he said. 'I guessed so. Fund up, our little Maria of the dirty fingers'-ends ! We accept no money from true patriots. Grub in other ground, my dear ! '

The woman stretched her throat awry, and set up a howl like a dog ; but her claws came out when he seized her.

'Would you disgrace me, old fowl ? '

'Lorenzo, may you rot like a pumpkin ! '

The connubial reciprocities were sharp until the money lay on the table, when the woman began whining so miserably that Vittoria's sensitive nerves danced on her face, and at her authoritative interposition, Lorenzo

very reluctantly permitted his wife to take what he chose to reckon a fair portion of the money, and also of his contempt. She seemed to be licking the money up, she bent over it so greedily.

'Poor wretch!' he observed; 'she was born on a hired bed.'

Vittoria felt that the recollection of this woman would haunt her. It was inconceivable to her that a handsome young man like Lorenzo should ever have wedded the unsweet creature, who was like a crawling image of decay; but he, as if to account for his taste, said that they had been of a common age once, when he married her; now she had grown old. He repeated that she 'was born on a hired bed.' They saw nothing further of her.

Vittoria's desire was to get to Meran speedily, that she might see her friends, and have tidings of her lover and the city. Those baffled beacon-flames on the heights had become an irritating indicative vision: she thirsted for the history. Lorenzo offered to conduct her over the Tonale Pass into the Val di Sole, or up the Val Furva, by the pass of the Corno dei Tre Signori, into the Val del Monte to Pejo, thence by Cles, or by Bolzano, to Meran. But she required shoeing and refitting; and for other reasons also, she determined to go on to Bormio. She supposed that Angelo had little money, and that in a place such as Bormio sounded to her ears she might possibly obtain the change for the great money-order which the triumph of her singing had won from Antonio-Pericles. In spite of Angelo's appeals to her to hurry on to the end of her journey without tempting chance by a single pause, she resolved to go to Bormio. Lorenzo privately assured her that there were bankers in Bormio. Many bankers, he said, came there from Milan, and that fact she thought sufficient for her purpose. The wanderers parted regretfully. A little chapel, on a hillock

off the road, shaded by chestnuts, was pointed out to Lorenzo where to bring a letter for Angelo. Vittoria begged Angelo to wait till he heard from her ; and then, with mutual wavings of hands, she was driven out of his sight.

CHAPTER XXV

ACROSS THE MOUNTAINS

After parting from Vittoria, Angelo made his way to an inn, where he ate and drank like a man of the fields, and slept with the power of one from noon till after morning. The innkeeper came up to his room, and, finding him awake, asked him if he was disposed to take a second holiday in bed. Angelo jumped up ; as he did so, his stiletto slipped from under his pillow and flashed.

'That 's a pretty bit of steel,' said the innkeeper, but could not get a word out of him. It was plain to Angelo that this fellow had suspicions. Angelo had been careful to tie up his clothes in a bundle ; there was nothing for the innkeeper to see, save a young man in bed, who had a terrible weapon near his hand, and a look in his eyes of wary indolence that counselled prudent dealings. He went out, and returned a second and a third time, talking more and more confusedly and fretfully ; but as he was again going to leave, 'No, no,' said Angelo, determined to give him a lesson, 'I have taken a liking to your company. Here, come here ; I will show you a trick. I learnt it from the Servians when I was three feet high. Look ; I lie quite still, you observe. Try to get on the other side of that door and the point of this blade shall scratch you through it.'

Angelo laid the blue stilet up his wrist, and slightly curled his arm. 'Try,' he repeated, but the innkeeper had stopped short in his movement to the door. 'Well, then, stay where you are,' said Angelo, 'and look; I 'll be as good as my word. There 's the point I shall strike.' With that he gave the peculiar Servian jerk of the muscles, from the wrist up to the arm, and the blade quivered on the mark. The innkeeper fell back in admiring horror. 'Now fetch it to me,' said Angelo, putting both hands carelessly under his head. The innkeeper tugged at the blade. 'Illustrious signore, I am afraid of breaking it,' he almost whimpered; 'it seems alive, does it not?'

'Like a hawk on a small bird,' said Angelo; 'that 's the beauty of those blades. They kill, and put you to as little pain as a shot; and it 's better than a shot in your breast—there 's something to show for it. Send up your wife or your daughter to take orders about my breakfast. It 's the breakfast of five mountaineers; and don't "Illustrious signore" me, sir, either in my hearing or out of it. Leave the knife sticking.'

The innkeeper sidled out with a dumb salute. 'I can count on his discretion for a couple of hours,' Angelo said to himself. He knew the effect of an exhibition of physical dexterity and strength upon a coward. The landlord's daughter came and received his orders for breakfast. Angelo inquired whether they had been visited by Germans of late. The girl told him that a German chasseur with a couple of soldiers had called them up last night.

'Wouldn't it have been a pity if they had dragged me out and shot me?' said Angelo.

'But they were after a lady,' she explained; 'they have gone on to Bormio, and expect to catch her there or in the mountains.'

'Better there than in the mountains, my dear; don't you think so?'

The girl said that she would not like to meet those fellows among the mountains.

'Suppose you were among the mountains, and those fellows came up with you; wouldn't you clap your hands to see me jumping down right in front of you all?' said Angelo.

'Yes, I should,' she admitted. 'What is one man, though!'

'Something, if he feeds like five. Quick! I must eat. Have you a lover?'

'Yes.'

'Fancy you are waiting on him.'

'He 's only a middling lover, signore. He lives at Cles, over Val Pejo, in Val di Non, a long way, and courts me twice a year, when he comes over to do carpentering. He cuts very pretty Madonnas. He is a German.'

'Ha! you kneel to the Madonna, and give your lips to a German? Go.'

'But I don't like him much, signore; it 's my father who wishes me to have him; he can make money.'

Angelo motioned to her to be gone, saying to himself, 'That father of hers would betray the Saints for a handful of florins.'

He dressed, and wrenched his knife from the door. Hearing the clatter of a horse at the porch, he stopped as he was descending the stairs. A German voice said, 'Sure enough, my jolly landlord, she 's there, in Worms —your Bormio. Found her at the big hotel: spoke not a syllable; stole away, stole away. One chopin of wine! I 'm off on four legs to the captain. Those lads who are after her by Roveredo and Trent have bad noses. "Poor nose—empty belly." Says the captain, "I stick at the point of the cross-roads." Says I, "Herr Captain, I 'm

back to you first of the lot." My business is to find the runaway lady—pretty Fräulein ! pretty Fräulein ! *laï-aï* ! There 's money on her servant, too ; he 's a disguised Excellency—a handsome boy ; but he has cut himself loose, and he go hang. Two birds for the pride of the thing ; one for satisfaction—I 'm satisfied. I 've killed chamois in my time. Jacob, I am ; Baumwalder, I am ; Feckelwitz, likewise ; and the very devil for following a track. Ach ! the wine is good. You know the song ?—

" He who drinks wine, he may cry with a will,
Fortune is mine, may she stick to me still."

I give it you in German—the language of song ! my own, my native ! *laï-aï—laï-aï—la-la-laï-aï-ï-ïē !*

" While stars still sit
On mountain tops,
I take my gun,
Kiss little one
On mother's breast.
Aī-īu-ē !

" My pipe is lit,
I climb the slopes,
I meet the dawn—
A little one
On mother's breast.
Aï-aïé : ta-ta-taï : ïu-ïu-ïu-ē!"

Another chopin, my jolly landlord. What 's that you 're mumbling ? About the servant of my runaway young lady ? He go hang ! What—— ? '

Angelo struck his foot heavily on the stairs ; the innkeeper coughed and ran back, bowing to his guest. The chasseur cried, ' I 'll drink farther on—wine between gaps ! ' A coin chinked on the steps in accompaniment to the chasseur's departing gallop. ' Beast of a Tedesco,'

the landlord exclaimed as he picked up the money; '*they* do the reckoning—not we. If I had served him with the worth of this, I should have had the bottle at my head. What a country ours is! We 're ridden over, ridden over!' Angelo compelled the landlord to sit with him while he ate like five mountaineers. He left mere bones on the table. 'It 's wonderful,' said the innkeeper; 'you can't know what fear is.'

'I think I don't,' Angelo replied; 'you do; cowards have to serve every party in turn. Up, and follow at my heels till I dismiss you. You know the pass into the Val Pejo and the Val di Sole.' The innkeeper stood entrenched behind a sturdy negative. Angelo eased him to submission by telling him that he only wanted the way to be pointed out. 'Bring tobacco; you 're going to have an idle day,' said Angelo: 'I pay you when we separate.' He was deaf to entreaties and refusals, and began to look mad about the eyes; his poor coward plied him with expostulations, offered his wife, his daughter, half the village, for the service: he had to follow, but would take no cigars. Angelo made his daughter fetch bread and cigars, and put a handful in his pocket, upon which, after two hours of inactivity at the foot of the little chapel, where Angelo waited for the coming of Vittoria's messenger, the innkeeper was glad to close his fist. About noon Lorenzo came, and at once acted a play of eyes for Angelo to perceive his distrust of the man and a multitude of bad things about him: he was reluctant, notwithstanding Angelo's ready nod, to bring out a letter; and frowned again, for emphasis to the expressive comedy. The letter said:—

'I have fallen upon English friends. They lend me money. Fly to Lugano by the help of these notes: I inclose them, and will not ask pardon for it. The Val-

tellina is dangerous ; the Stelvio we know to be watched. Retrace your way, and then try the Engadine. I should stop on a breaking bridge if I thought my companion, my Carlo's cousin, was near capture. I am well taken care of : one of my dearest friends, a captain in the English army, bears me company across. I have a maid from one of the villages, a willing girl. We ride up to the mountains ; to-morrow we cross the pass ; there is a glacier. Val di Non sounds Italian, but I am going into the enemy's land. You see I am well guarded. My immediate anxiety concerns you ; for what will our Carlo ask of me ? Lose not one moment. Away, and do not detain Lorenzo. He has orders to meet us up high in the mountain this evening. He is the best of servants : but I always meet the best everywhere—that is, in Italy. Leaving it, I grieve. No news from Milan, except of great confusion there. I judge by the quiet of my sleep that we have come to no harm there.

'Your faithfullest

'VITTORIA.'

Lorenzo and the innkeeper had arrived at an altercation before Angelo finished reading. Angelo checked it, and told Lorenzo to make speed : he sent no message.

'My humanity,' Angelo then addressed his craven associate, 'counsels me that it 's better to drag you some distance on than to kill you. You 're a man of intelligence, and you know why I have to consider the matter. I give you guide's pay up to the glacier, and ten florins buon'mano. Would you rather earn it with the blood of a countryman ? I can't let that tongue of yours be on the high-road of running Tedeschi : you know it.'

'Illustrious signore, obedience oils necessity,' quoth

the innkeeper. 'If we had but a few more of my cigars!'

'Step on,' said Angelo sternly.

They walked till dark and they were in keen air. A hut full of recent grass-cuttings, on the border of a sloping wood, sheltered them. The innkeeper moaned for food at night and in the morning, and Angelo tossed him pieces of bread. Beyond the wood they came upon bare crag and commenced a sharper ascent, reached the height, and roused an eagle. The great bird went up with a sharp yelp, hanging over them with knotted claws. Its shadow stretched across sweeps of fresh snow. The innkeeper sent a mocking yelp after the eagle.

'Up here, one forgets one is a father—what 's more, a husband,' he said, striking a finger on the side of his nose.

'And a cur, a traitor, carrion,' said Angelo.

'Ah, signore, one might know you were a noble. You can't understand our troubles, who carry a house on our heads, and have to fill mouths agape.'

'Speak when you have better to say,' Angelo replied.

'Padrone, one would really like to have your good opinion; and I 'm lean as a wolf for a morsel of flesh. I could part with my buon'mano for a sight of red meat—oh! red meat dripping.'

'If,' cried Angelo, bringing his eyebrows down black on the man,—'if I knew that you had ever in your life betrayed one of us—look below; there you should lie to be pecked and gnawed at.'

'Ah, Jacopo Cruchi, what an end for you when you are full of good meanings!' the innkeeper moaned. 'I see your ribs, my poor soul!'

Angelo quitted him. The tremendous excitement of the Alpine solitudes was like a stringent wine to his

surcharged spirit. He was one to whom life and death had become as the yes and no of ordinary men: not more than a turning to the right or to the left. It surprised him that this fellow, knowing his own cowardice and his conscience, should consent to live, and care to eat to live.

When he returned to his companion, he found the fellow drinking from the flask of an Austrian soldier. Another whitecoat was lying near. They pressed Angelo to drink, and began to play lubberly pranks. One clapped hands, while another rammed the flask at the reluctant mouth, till Angelo tripped him and made him a subject for derision; whereupon they were all good friends. Musket on shoulder, the soldiers descended, blowing at their finger-nails and puffing at their tobacco —*lauter käiserlicher* (rank Imperial), as with a sad enforcement of resignation they had, while lighting, characterized the universally detested Government issue of the leaf.

'They are after *her*,' said Jacopo, and he shot out his thumb and twisted an eyelid. His looks became insolent, and he added: 'I let them go on; but now, for my part, I must tell you, my worthy gentleman, I 've had enough of it. You go your way, I go mine. Pay me, and we part. With the utmost reverence, I quit you. Climbing mountains at my time of life is out of all reason. If you want companions, I 'll signal to that pair of Tedeschi; they 're within hail. Would you like it? Say the word, if you would—hey!'

Angelo smiled at the visible effect of the liquor.

'Barto Rizzo would be the man to take you in hand,' he remarked.

The innkeeper flung his head back to ejaculate, and murmured, 'Barto Rizzo! defend me from him! Why, he levies contribution upon us in the Valtellina for the

good of Milan ; and if we don't pay, we 're all of us down in a black book. Disobey, and it 's worse than swearing you won't pay taxes to the legitimate—perdition to it ! —Government. Do you know Barto Rizzo, padrone ? You don't know him, I hope ? I 'm sure you wouldn't know such a fellow.'

' I am his favourite pupil,' said Angelo.

' I 'd have sworn it,' groaned the innkeeper, and cursed the day and hour when Angelo crossed his threshold. That done, he begged permission to be allowed to return, crying with tears of entreaty for mercy : ' Barto Rizzo's pupils are always out upon bloody businesses ! ' Angelo told him that he had now an opportunity of earning the approval of Barto Rizzo, and then said, ' On,' and they went in the track of the two whitecoats ; the innkeeper murmuring all the while that he wanted the approval of Barto Rizzo as little as his enmity ; he wanted neither frost nor fire. The glacier being traversed, they skirted a young stream, and arrived at an inn, where they found the soldiers regaling. Jacopo was informed by them that the lady whom they were pursuing had not passed. They pushed their wine for Angelo to drink : he declined, saying that he had sworn not to drink before he had shot the chamois with the white cross on his back.

' Come : we 're two to one,' they said, ' and drink you shall this time ! '

' Two to two,' returned Angelo : ' here is my Jacopo, and if he doesn't count for one, I won't call him father-in-law, and the fellow living at Cles may have his daughter without fighting for her.'

' Right so,' said one of the soldiers, ' and you don't speak bad German already.'

' Haven't I served in the ranks ? ' said Angelo, giving a bugle-call of the reveillée of the cavalry.

He got on with them so well that they related the object of their expedition, which was, to catch a runaway young rebel lady and hold her fast down at Cles for the great captain—*unser tüchtiger Hauptmann.*

'Hadn't she a servant, a sort of rascal?' Angelo inquired.

'Right so; she had: but the doe 's the buck in this chase.'

Angelo tossed them cigars. The valley was like a tumbled mountain, thick with crags and eminences, through which the river worked strenuously, sinuous in foam, hurrying at the turns. Angelo watched all the ways from a distant height till set of sun. He saw another couple of soldiers meet those two at the inn, and then one pair went up toward the vale-head. It seemed as if Vittoria had disconcerted them by having chosen another route.

'Padrone,' said Jacopo to him abruptly, when they descended to find a resting-place, 'you are, I speak humbly, so like the devil that I must enter into a stipulation with you, before I continue in your company, and take the worst at once. This is going to be the second night of my sleeping away from my wife: I merely mention it. I pinch her, and she beats me, and we are equal. But if you think of making me fight, I tell you I won't. If there was a furnace behind me, I should fall into it rather than run against a bayonet. I 've heard say that the nerves are in the front part of us, and that 's where I feel the shock. Now we 're on a plain footing. Say that I 'm not to fight. I 'll be your servant till you release me, but say I 'm not to fight; padrone, say that.'

'I can't say that: I 'll say I won't make you fight,' Angelo pacified him by replying. From this moment Jacopo followed him less like a graceless dog pulled by

his chain. In fact, with the sense of prospective security, he tasted a luxurious amazement in being moved about by a superior will, wafted from his inn, and paid for witnessing strange incidents. Angelo took care that he was fed well at the place where they slept, but himself ate nothing. Early after dawn they mounted the heights above the road. It was about noon that Angelo discerned a party coming from the pass on foot, consisting of two women and three men. They rested an hour at the village where he had slept overnight; the muskets were a quarter of a mile to the rear of them. When they started afresh, one of the muskets was discharged, and while the echoes were rolling away, a reply to it sounded in the front. Angelo, from his post of observation, could see that Vittoria and her party were marching between two guards, and that she herself must have perceived both the front and rearward couple. Yet she and her party held on their course at an even pace. For a time he kept them clearly in view; but it was tough work along the slopes of crag: presently Jacopo slipped and went down. 'Ah, padrone,' he said: 'I 'm done for; leave me.'

'Not though I should have to haul you on my back,' replied Angelo. 'If I do leave you, I must cut out your tongue.'

'Rather than that, I 'd go on a sprained ankle,' said Jacopo, and he strove manfully to conquer pain; limping and exclaiming, 'Oh, my little village! Oh, my little inn! When can a man say that he has finished running about the world! The moment he sits, in comes the devil.'

Angelo was obliged to lead him down to the open way, upon which they made slow progress.

'The noble gentleman might let me return—he might trust me now,' Jacopo whimpered.

'The devil trusts nobody,' said Angelo.

'Ah, padrone! there 's a crucifix. Let me kneel by that.'

Angelo indulged him. Jacopo knelt by the wayside and prayed for an easy ankle and a snoring pillow and no wakeners. After this he was refreshed. The sun sank; the darkness spread around; the air grew icy. 'Does the Blessed Virgin ever consider what patriots have to endure?' Jacopo muttered to himself, and aroused a rare laugh from Angelo, who seized him under the arm, half-lifting him on. At the inn where they rested, he bathed and bandaged the foot.

'I can't help feeling a kindness to you for it,' said Jacopo.

'I can't afford to leave you behind,' Angelo accounted for his attention.

'Padrone, we 've been understanding one another all along by our thumbs. It 's that old inn of mine—the taxes! we have to sell our souls to pay the taxes. There 's the tongue of the thing. I wouldn't betray you; I wouldn't.'

'I 'll try you,' said Angelo, and put him to proof next day, when the soldiers stopped them as they were driving in a cart, and Jacopo swore to them that Angelo was his intended son-in-law.

There was evidently an unusual activity among the gendarmerie of the lower valley, the Val di Non; for Jacopo had to repeat his fable more than once, and Angelo thought it prudent not to make inquiries about travellers. In this valley they were again in summer heat. Summer splendours robed the broken ground. The Val di Non lies toward the sun, banked by the Val di Sole, like the southern lizard under a stone. Chestnut forest and shoulder over shoulder of vineyard, and meadows of marvellous emerald, with here and there central partly-wooded crags, peaked with castle-ruins, and ancestral

castles that are still warm homes, and villages dropped among them, and a river bounding and rushing eagerly through the rich enclosure, form the scene, beneath that Italian sun which turns everything to gold. There is a fair breadth to the vale : it enjoys a great oval of sky : the falls of shade are dispersed, dot the hollow range, and are not at noontide a broad curtain passing over from right to left. The sun reigns and also governs in the Val di Non.

'The grape has his full benefit here, padrone,' said Jacopo.

But the place was too populous, and too much subjected to the general eye, to please Angelo. At Cles they were compelled to bear an inspection, and a little comedy occurred. Jacopo, after exhibiting Angelo as his son-in-law, seeing doubts on the soldiers' faces, mentioned the name of the German suitor for his daughter's hand—the carpenter, Johann Spellmann, to whose workshop he requested to be taken. Johann, being one of the odd Germans in the valley, was well known : he was carving wood astride a stool, and stopped his whistling to listen to the soldiers, who took the first word out of Jacopo's mouth, and were convinced, by Johann's droop of the chin, that the tale had some truth in it ; and more when Johann yelled at the Valtelline innkeeper to know why, then, he had come to him, if he was prepared to play him false. One of the soldiers said bluntly, that as Angelo's appearance answered to the portrait of a man for whom they were on the lookout, they would, if their countryman liked, take him and give him a dose of marching and imprisonment.

'Ach ! that won't make my little Rosetta love me better,' cried Johann, who commenced taking up a string of reproaches against women, and pitched his carving-blade and tools abroad in the wood-dust.

'Well, now, it 's queer you don't want to fight this lad,' said Jacopo; 'he 's come to square it with you that way, if you think best.'

Johann spared a remark between his vehement imprecations against the sex to say that he was ready to fight; but his idea of vengeance was directed upon the abstract conception of a faithless womankind. Angelo, by reason of his detestation of Germans, temporarily threw himself into the part he was playing to the extent of despising him. Johann admitted to Jacopo that intervals of six months' duration in a courtship were wide jumps for Love to take.

'Yes; amor! amor!' he exclaimed with extreme dejection; '*I* could wait. Well! since you 've brought the young man, we 'll have it out.'

He stepped before Angelo with bare fists. Jacopo had to interpose. The soldiers backed Johann, who now said to Angelo, 'Since you 've come for it, we 'll have it out.'

Jacopo had great difficulty in bringing him to see that it was a matter to talk over. Johann swore he would not talk about it, and was ready to fight a dozen Italians, man up man down.

'Bare-fisted?' screamed Jacopo.

'Hey! the old way! Give him knuckles, and break his back, my boy!' cried the soldiers; 'none of their steel *this* side of the mountain.'

Johann waited for Angelo to lift his hands; and to instigate his reluctant adversary, thumped his chest; but Angelo did not move. The soldiers roared.

'If she has you, she shall have a dolly,' said Johann, now heated with the prospect of presenting that sort of husband to his little Rosetta. At this juncture Jacopo threw himself between them.

'It shall be a real fight,' he said; 'my daughter can't

make up her mind, and she shall have the best man. Leave me to arrange it all fairly ; and you come here in a couple of hours, my children,' he addressed the soldiers, who unwillingly quitted the scene where there was a certainty of fun, on the assurance of there being a livelier scene to come.

When they had turned their heels on the shop, Jacopo made a face at Johann ; Johann swung round upon Angelo, and met a smile. Then followed explanations.

'What 's that you say ? She 's true—she 's true ? ' exclaimed the astounded lover.

'True enough, but a girl at an inn wants hotter courting,' said Jacopo. 'His Excellency here is after his own sweetheart.'

Johann huzzaed, hugged at Angelo's hands, and gave a lusty filial tap to Jacopo on the shoulder. Bread and grapes and Tyrolese wine were placed for them, and Johann's mother soon produced a salad, eggs, and fowl ; and then and there declared her willingness to receive Rosetta into the household, 'if she would swear at the outset never to have *heimweh* (home-longing) ; as people —men and women, both—always did when they took a new home across a mountain.'

'She won't—will she ? ' Johann inquired with a dubious sparkle.

'Not she,' said Jacopo.

After the meal he drew Johann aside. They returned to Angelo, and Johann beckoned him to leave the house by a back way, leading up a slope of garden into high vine-poles. He said that he had seen a party pass out of Cles from the inn early, in a light car, on for Meran. The gendarmerie were busy on the road : a mounted officer had dashed up to the inn an hour later, and had followed them : it was the talk of the village.

'Padrone, you dismiss me now,' said Jacopo.

'I pay you, but don't dismiss you,' said Angelo, and handed him a bank-note.

'I stick to you, padrone, till you do dismiss me,' Jacopo sighed.

Johann offered to conduct them as far as the Monte Pallade pass, and they started, avoiding the high road, which was enviably broad and solid. Within view of a village under climbing woods, they discerned an open car, flanked by bayonets, returning to Cles. Angelo rushed ahead of them down the declivity, and stood full in the road to meet the procession. A girl sat in the car, who hung her head, weeping; Lorenzo was beside her; an Englishman on foot gave employment to a pair of soldiers to get him along. As they came near at marching pace, Lorenzo yawned and raised his hand to his cheek, keeping the thumb pointed behind him. Including the girl, there were four prisoners: Vittoria was absent. The Englishman, as he was being propelled forward, addressed Angelo in French, asking him whether he could bear to see an unoffending foreigner treated with wanton violation of law. The soldiers bellowed at their captive, and Angelo sent a stupid shrug after him. They rounded a bend of the road. Angelo tightened the buckle at his waist.

'Now I trust you,' he said to Jacopo. 'Follow the length of five miles over the pass: if you don't see me then, you have your liberty, tongue and all.'

With that he doubled his arms and set forth at a steady run, leaving his companions to speculate on his powers of endurance. They did so complacently enough, until Jacopo backed him for a distance and Johann betted against him, when behold them at intervals taking a sharp trot to keep him in view.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE DUEL IN THE PASS

MEANWHILE Captain Weisspriess had not been idle. Standing at a blunt angle of the ways converging upon Vittoria's presumed destination, he had roused up the gendarmerie along the routes to Meran by Trent on one side, and Bormio on the other ; and he soon came to the conclusion that she had rejected the valley of the Adige for the Valtelline, whence he supposed that she would be tempted either to cross the Stelvio or one of the passes into Southernmost Tyrol. He was led to think that she would certainly bear upon Switzerland, by a course of reasoning connected with Angelo Guidascarpi, who, fleeing under the cross of blood, might be calculated on to push for the mountains of the Republic ; and he might—judging by the hazards—conduct the lady thither, to enjoy the fruits of crime and love in security. The captain, when he had discovered Angelo's crest and name on the betraying handkerchief, had no doubts concerning the nature of their intimacy, and he was spurred by a new and thrice eager desire to capture the couple—the criminal for the purposes of justice, and the other because he had pledged his notable reputation in the chase of her. The conscience of this man's vanity was extremely active. He had engaged to conquer the stubborn girl, and he thought it possible that he might take a mistress from the patriot ranks, with a loud ha ! ha ! at revolutionists, and some triumph over his comrades. And besides, he was the favourite of Countess Anna of Lenkenstein, who yet refused to bring her estates to him ; she dared to

trifle ; she also was a woman who required rude lessons. Weisspriess, a poor soldier bearing the heritage of lusty appetites, had an eye on his fortune, and served neither Mars alone nor Venus. Countess Anna was to be among that company assembled at the Castle of Sonnenberg in Meran ; and if, while introducing Vittoria there with a discreet and exciting reserve, he at the same time handed over the assassin of Count Paul, a fine harvest of praise and various pleasant forms of female passion were to be looked for—a rich vista of a month's intrigue ; at the end of it possibly his wealthy lady, thoroughly tamed, for a wife, and redoubled triumph over his comrades. Without these successes, what availed the fame of the keenest swordsman in the Austrian army ?—The feast as well as the plumes of vanity offered rewards for the able exercise of his wits.

He remained at the sub-Alpine inn until his servant Wilhelm (for whom he had despatched the duchess's chasseur, then in attendance on Vittoria) arrived from Milan, bringing his uniform. The chasseur was directed on the Bormio line, with orders that he should cause the arrest of Vittoria only in the case of her being on the extreme limit of the Swiss frontier. Keeping his communications alert, Weisspriess bore that way to meet him. Fortune smiled on his strategy. Jacob Baumwalder Feckelwitz—full of wine, and discharging hurrahs along the road—met him on the bridge over the roaring Oglio, just out of Edolo, and gave him news of the fugitives. 'Both of them were at the big hotel in Bormio,' said Jacob ; 'and I set up a report that the Stelvio was watched ; and so it is.' He added that he thought they were going to separate ; he had heard something to that effect ; he believed that the young lady was bent upon crossing one of the passes to Meran. Last night it had devolved on him to kiss away the tears of the

young lady's maid, a Valtelline peasant-girl, who deplored the idea of an expedition over the mountains, and had, with the usual cat-like tendencies of these Italian minxes, torn his cheek in return for his assiduities. Jacob displayed the pretty scratch obtained in the Herr Captain's service, and got his money for having sighted Vittoria and seen double. Weisspriess decided in his mind that Angelo had now separated from her (or rather, she from him) for safety. He thought it very probable that she would likewise fly to Switzerland. Yet, knowing that there was the attraction of many friends for her at Meran, he conceived that he should act more prudently by throwing himself on that line, and he sped Jacob Baumwalder along the Valtelline by Val Viola, up to Ponte in the Engadine, with orders to seize her if he could see her, and have her conveyed to Cles, in Tyrol. Vittoria being only by the gentlest interpretation of her conduct not under interdict, an unscrupulous Imperial officer might in those military times venture to employ the gendarmerie for his own purposes, if he could but give a plausible colour of devotion to the Imperial interests.

The chasseur sped lamentingly back, and Weisspriess, taking a guide from the skirting hamlet above Edolo, quitted the Val Camonica, climbed the Tonale, and reached Vermiglio in the branch valley of that name, scientifically observing the features of the country as he went. At Vermiglio he encountered a brother officer of one of his former regiments, a fat major on a tour of inspection, who happened to be a week behind news of the army, and detained him on the pretext of helping him on his car—a mockery that drove Weisspriess to the perpetual reply, 'You are my superior officer,' which reduced the major to ask him whether he had been degraded a step. As usual, Weisspriess was pushed to

assert his haughtiness, backed by the shadow of his sword. 'I am a man with a family,' said the major, modestly. 'Then I shall call you my superior officer while they allow you to remain so,' returned Weisspriess, who scorned a married soldier.

'I aspired to the Staff once myself,' said the major. 'Unfortunately, I grew in girth—the wrong way for ambition. I digest, I assimilate with a fatal ease. Stout men are doomed to the obscurer paths. You may quote Napoleon as a contrary instance. I maintain positively that his day was over, his sun was eclipsed, when his valet had to loosen the buckles of his waistcoat and breech. Now, what do you say?'

'I say,' Weisspriess replied, 'that if there 's a further depreciation of the paper currency, we shall none of us have much chance of digesting or assimilating either—if I know at all what those processes mean.'

'Our good Lombard cow is not half squeezed enough,' observed the major, confidentially in tone. 'When she makes a noise—quick! the pail at her udders and work away; that 's my advice. What 's the verse?—our Zwitterwitz's, I mean; the Viennese poet:—

> "Her milk is good—the Lombard cow;
> Let her be noisy when she pleases:
> But if she kicks the pail, I vow,
> We 'll make her used to sharper squeezes:
> We 'll write her mighty deeds in CHEESES:
> (That is, if she yields milk enow)."

'Capital! capital!' the major applauded his quotation, and went on to speak of 'that Zwitterwitz' as having served in a border regiment, after creating certain Court scandal, and of his carrying off a Wallach lady from her lord and selling her to a Turk, and turning Turk himself and keeping a harem. Five years later he reappeared

in Vienna with a volume of what he called 'Black Eagle Poems,' and regained possession of his barony. 'So far, so good,' said the major; 'but when he applied for his old commission in the army—that was rather too cool.'

Weisspriess muttered intelligibly, 'I 've heard the remark, that you can't listen to a man five minutes without getting something out of him.'

'I don't know; it may be,' said the major, imagining that Weisspriess demanded some stronger flavours of gossip in his talk. 'There 's no stir in these valleys. They arrested, somewhere close on Trent yesterday afternoon, a fellow calling himself Beppo, the servant of an Italian woman—a dancer, I fancy. They 're on the lookout for her too, I 'm told; though what sort of capers she can be cutting in Tyrol, I can't even guess.'

The major's car was journeying leisurely toward Cles. 'Whip that brute!' Weisspriess sang out to the driver, and begging the major's pardon, requested to know whither he was bound. The major informed him that he hoped to sup in Trent. 'Good heaven! not at this pace,' Weisspriess shouted. But the pace was barely accelerated, and he concealed his reasons for invoking speed. They were late in arriving at Trent, where Weisspriess cast eye on the imprisoned wretch, who declared piteously that he was the trusted and innocent servant of the signorina Vittoria, and had been visiting all the castles of Meran in search of her. The captain's man Wilhelm had been the one to pounce on poor Beppo while the latter was wandering disconsolately. Leaving him to howl, Weisspriess procured the loan of a horse from a colonel of cavalry at the Buon Consiglio barracks, and mounted an hour before dawn, followed by Wilhelm. He reached Cles in time to learn that Vittoria and her

party had passed through it a little in advance of him. Breakfasting there, he enjoyed the first truly calm cigar of many days. Gendarmes whom he had met near the place came in at his heels. They said that the party would positively be arrested, or not allowed to cross the Monte Pallade. The passes to Meran and Botzen, and the road to Trent, were strictly guarded. Weisspriess hurried them forward with particular orders that they should take into custody the whole of the party, excepting the lady; her, if arrested with the others, they were to release: her maid and the three men were to be marched back to Cles, and there kept fast.

The game was now his own: he surveyed its pretty intricate moves as on a map. The character of Herr Johannes he entirely discarded: an Imperial officer in his uniform, sword in belt, could scarcely continue that meek performance. 'But I may admire music, and entreat her to give me a particular note, if she has it,' said the captain, hanging in contemplation over a coming scene, like a quivering hawk about to close its wings. His heart beat thick; which astonished him: hitherto it had never made that sort of movement.

From Cles he despatched a letter to the fair châtelaine at Meran, telling her that by dainty and skilful management of the paces, he was bringing on the intractable heroine of the Fifteenth, and was to be expected in about two or three days. The letter was entrusted to Wilhelm, who took the borrowed horse back to Trent.

Weisspriess was on the mule-track a mile above the last village ascending to the pass, when he observed the party of prisoners, and climbed up into covert. As they went by he discerned but one person in female garments; the necessity to crouch for obscurity prevented him from examining them separately. He counted three men and

beheld one of them between gendarmes. 'That must be my villain,' he said.

It was clear that Vittoria had chosen to go forward alone. The captain praised her spirit, and now pushed ahead with hunter's strides. He passed an inn, closed and tenantless : behind him lay the Val di Non ; in front the darker valley of the Adige : where was the prey ? A storm of rage set in upon him with the fear that he had been befooled. He lit a cigar, to assume ease of aspect, whatever the circumstances might be, and gain some inward serenity by the outer reflection of it—not altogether without success. 'My lady must be a doughty walker,' he thought ; 'at this rate she will be in the Ultenthal before sunset.' A wooded height ranged on his left as he descended rapidly. Coming to a roll of grass dotted with grey rock, he climbed it, and mounting one of the boulders, beheld at a distance of half-a-dozen stone-throws downward, the figure of a woman holding her hand cup-shape to a wayside fall of water. The path by which she was going rounded the height he stood on. He sprang over the rocks, catching up his clattering steel scabbard ; and plunging through tinted leafage and green underwood, steadied his heels on a sloping bank, and came down on the path with stones and earth and brambles, in time to appear as a seated pedestrian when Vittoria turned the bend of the mountain way.

Gracefully withdrawing the cigar from his mouth, and touching his breast with turned-in fingers, he accosted her with a comical operatic effort at her high notes : 'Italia ! '

She gathered her arms on her bosom and looked swiftly round : then at the apparition of her enemy.

It is but an ironical form of respect that you offer to the prey you have been hotly chasing and have

caught. Weisspriess conceived that he had good reasons for addressing her in the tone best suited to his character: he spoke with a ridiculous mincing suavity:

'My pretty sweet! are you not tired? We have not seen one another for days! Can you have forgotten the enthusiastic Herr Johannes? You have been in pleasant company, no doubt; but I have been all—all alone. Think of that! What an exceedingly fortunate chance this is! I was smoking dolefully, and imagining anything but such a rapture.—No, no, mademoiselle, be mannerly.' The captain blocked her passage. 'You must not leave me while I am speaking. A good governess would have taught you that in the nursery. I am afraid you had an inattentive governess, who did not impress upon you the duty of recognizing friends when you meet them! Ha! you were educated in England, I have heard. Shake hands. It is our custom—I think a better one—to kiss on the right cheek and the left, but we will shake hands.'

'In God's name, sir, let me go on,' Vittoria could just gather voice to utter.

'But,' cried the delighted captain, 'you address me in the tones of a basso profundo! It is absurd. Do you suppose that I am to be deceived by your artifice?—rogue that you are! Don't I know you are a woman? a sweet, an ecstatic, a darling little woman!'

He laughed. She shivered to hear the solitary echoes. There was sunlight on the farthest Adige walls, but damp shade already filled the East-facing hollows.

'I beg you very earnestly, to let me go on,' said Vittoria.

'With equal earnestness, I beg you to let me accompany you,' he replied. 'I mean no offence, mademoiselle; but I have sworn that I and no one but I shall conduct you to the Castle of Sonnenberg, where you will meet

the Lenkenstein ladies, with whom I have the honour to be acquainted. You see, you have nothing to fear if you play no foolish pranks, like a kicking filly in the pasture.'

'If it is your pleasure,' she said gravely; but he obtruded the bow of an arm. She drew back. Her first blank despair at sight of the trap she had fallen into, was clearing before her natural high courage.

'My little lady! my precious prima donna! do you refuse the most trifling aid from me? It 's because I 'm a German.'

'There are many noble gentlemen who are Germans,' said Vittoria.

'It 's because I 'm a German; I know it is. But, don't you see, Germany invades Italy, and keeps hold of her? Providence decrees it so—ask the priests! You are a delicious Italian damsel, and you will take the arm of a German.'

Vittoria raised her face. 'Do you mean that I am your prisoner?'

'You did not look braver at La Scala'; the captain bowed to her.

'Ah, I forgot,' said she; 'you saw me there. If, signore, you will do me the favour to conduct me to the nearest inn, I will sing to you.'

'It is precisely my desire, signorina. You are not married to that man Guidascarpi, I presume? No, no: you are merely his . . . friend. May I have the felicity of hearing you call *me* your friend. Why, you tremble! are you afraid of me?'

'To tell the truth, you talk too much to please me,' said Vittoria.

The captain praised her frankness, and he liked it. The trembling of her frame still fascinated his eyes, but her courage and the absence of all womanly play and cowering

about her manner impressed him seriously. He stood looking at her, biting his moustache, and trying to provoke her to smile.

'Conduct you to the nearest inn; yes,' he said, as if musing. 'To the nearest inn, where you will sing to me; sing to me. It is not an objectionable scheme. The inns will not be choice: but the society will be exquisite. Say first, I am your sworn cavalier?'

'It does not become me to say that,' she replied, feigning a demure sincerity, on the verge of her patience.

'You allow me to say it?'

She gave him a look of fire and passed him; whereat, following her, he clapped hands, and affected to regard the movement as part of an operatic scena. 'It is now time to draw your dagger,' he said. 'You have one, I 'm certain.'

'Anything but touch me!' cried Vittoria, turning on him. 'I know that I am safe. You shall teaze me, if it amuses you.'

'Am I not, now, the object of your detestation?'

'You are near being so.'

'You see! You put on no disguise; why should I?'

This remark struck her with force.

'My temper is foolish,' she said softly. 'I have always been used to kindness.'

He vowed that she had no comprehension of kindness; otherwise would she continue defiant of him? She denied that she was defiant: upon which he accused the hand in her bosom of clutching a dagger. She cast the dagger at his feet. It was nobly done, and he was not insensible to the courage and inspiration of the act; for it checked a little example of a trial of strength that he had thought of exhibiting to an armed damsel.

'Shall I pick it up for you?' he said.

'You will oblige me,' was her answer; but she could not control a convulsion of her underlip that her defensive instinct told her was best hidden.

'Of course, you know you are safe,' he repeated her previous words, while examining the silver handle of the dagger. 'Safe? certainly! Here is C. A. to V. . . . A. neatly engraved: a gift; so that the young gentleman may be sure the young lady will defend herself from lions and tigers and wild boars, if ever she goes through forests and over mountain passes. I will not obtrude my curiosity, but who is V. . . . A.?'

The dagger was Carlo's gift to her; the engraver, by singular misadventure, had put a capital letter for the concluding letter of her name instead of little *a*; she remembered the blush on Carlo's face when she had drawn his attention to the error, and her own blush when she had guessed its meaning.

'It spells my name,' she said.

'Your assumed name of Vittoria. And who is C. A.?'

'Those are the initials of Count Carlo Ammiani.'

'Another lover?'

'He is my sole lover. He is my betrothed. Oh, good God!' she threw her eyes up to heaven; 'how long am I to endure the torture of this man in my pathway? Go, sir, or let me go on. You are intolerable. It 's the spirit of a tiger. I have no fear of you.'

'Nay, nay,' said Weisspriess, 'I asked the question because I am under an obligation to run Count Carlo Ammiani through the body, and felt at once that I should regret the necessity. As to your not fearing me, really, far from wishing to hurt you——'

Vittoria had caught sight of a white face framed in the autumnal forest above her head. So keen was

the glad expression of her face, that Weisspriess looked up.

'Come, Angelo, come to me,' she said confidently.

Weisspriess plucked his sword out, and called to him imperiously to descend.

Beckoned downward by white hand and flashing blade, Angelo steadied his feet and hands among drooping chestnut boughs, and bounded to Vittoria's side.

'Now march on,' Weisspriess waved his sword; 'you are my prisoners.'

'You,' retorted Angelo; 'I know you; you are a man marked out for one of us. I bid you turn back, if you care for your body's safety.'

'Angelo Guidascarpi, I also know you. Assassin! you double murderer! Defy me, and I slay you in the sight of your paramour.'

'Captain Weisspriess, what you have spoken merits death. I implore of my Maker that I may not have to kill you.'

'Fool! you are unarmed.'

Angelo took his stilet in his fist.

'I have warned you, Captain Weisspriess. Here I stand. I dare you to advance.'

'You pronounce my name abominably,' said the captain, dropping his sword's point. 'If you think of resisting me, let us have no women looking on.' He waved his left hand at Vittoria.

Angelo urged her to go. 'Step on for our Carlo's sake.' But it was asking too much of her.

'Can you fight this man?' she asked.

'I can fight him and kill him.'

'I will not step on,' she said. 'Must you fight him?'

'There is no choice.'

Vittoria walked to a distance at once.

Angelo directed the captain's eyes to where, lower in the pass, there was a level plot of meadow.

Weisspriess nodded. 'The odds are in my favour, so you shall choose the ground.'

All three went silently to the meadow.

It was a circle of green on a projecting shoulder of the mountain, bounded by woods that sank toward the now shadowy South-flowing Adige vale, whose Western heights were gathering red colour above a strongly-marked brown line. Vittoria stood at the border of the wood, leaving the two men to their work. She knew when speech was useless.

Captain Weisspriess paced behind Angelo until the latter stopped short, saying, 'Here!'

'Wherever you please,' Weisspriess responded. 'The ground is of more importance to you than to me.'

They faced mutually; one felt the point of his stilet, the other the temper of his sword.

'Killing you, Angelo Guidascarpi, is the killing of a dog. But there are such things as mad dogs. This is not a duel. It is a righteous execution, since you force me to it: I shall deserve your thanks for saving you from the hangman. I think you have heard that I can use my weapon. There 's death on this point for you. Make your peace with your Maker.'

Weisspriess spoke sternly. He delayed the lifting of his sword that the bloody soul might pray.

Angelo said, 'You are a good soldier: you are a bad priest. Come on.'

A nod of magnanimous resignation to the duties of his office was the captain's signal of readiness. He knew exactly the method of fighting which Angelo must adopt, and he saw that his adversary was supple, and sinewy, and very keen of eye. But, what can well compensate for even one additional inch of steel? A superior weapon

wielded by a trained wrist in perfect coolness means victory, by every reasonable reckoning. In the present instance, it meant nothing other than an execution, as he had said. His contemplation of his own actual share in the performance was nevertheless unpleasant; and it was but half willingly that he straightened out his sword and then doubled his arm. He lessened the odds in his favour considerably by his too accurate estimation of them. He was also a little unmanned by the thought that a woman was to see him using his advantage; but she stood firm in her distant corner, refusing to be waved out of sight. Weisspriess had again to assure himself that it was not a duel, but the enforced execution of a criminal who would not surrender, and who was in his way. Fronting a creature that would vainly assail him, and temporarily escape impalement by bounding and springing, dodging and backing, now here now there, like a dangling bob-cherry, his military gorge rose with a sickness of disgust. He had to remember as vividly as he could realize it, that this man's life was forfeited, and that the slaughter of him was a worthy service to Countess Anna; also, that there were present reasons for desiring to be quit of him. He gave Angelo two thrusts, and bled him. The skill which warded off the more vicious one aroused his admiration.

'Pardon my blundering,' he said; 'I have never engaged a saltimbanque before.'

They recommenced. Weisspriess began to weigh the sagacity of his opponent's choice of open ground, where he could lengthen the discourse of steel by retreating and retreating, and swinging easily to right or to left. In the narrow track the sword would have transfixed him after a single feint. He was amused. Much of the cat was in his combative nature. An idea of disabling or dismembering Angelo, and forwarding him to Meran,

caused him to trifle further with the edge of the blade. Angelo took a cut, and turned it on his arm ; free of the deadly point, he rushed in and delivered a stab ; but Weisspriess saved his breast. Quick, they resumed their former positions.

' I am really so unused to this game ! ' said Weisspriess, apologetically.

He was pale : his unsteady breathing, and a deflection of his dripping sword-wrist, belied his coolness. Angelo plunged full on him, dropped, and again reached his right arm ; they hung, getting blood for blood, with blazing interpenetrating eyes ;—a ghastly work of dark hands at half lock thrusting, and savage eyes reading the fiery pages of the book of hell. At last the Austrian got loose from the lock and hurled him off.

' That bout was hotter,' he remarked ; and kept his sword-point out on the whole length of the arm : he would have scorned another for so miserable a form either of attack or defence.

Vittoria beheld Angelo circling round the point, which met him everywhere ; like the minute hand of a clock about to sound his hour, she thought.

He let fall both his arms, as if beaten, which brought on the attack : by sheer evasion he got away from the sword's lunge, and essayed a second trial of the bite of steel at close quarters ; but the Austrian backed and kept him to the point, darting short alluring thrusts, thinking to tempt him on, or to wind him, and then to have him. Weisspriess was chilled by a more curious revulsion from this sort of engagement than he at first experienced. He had become nervously incapable of those proper niceties of sword-play which, without any indecent hacking and maiming, should have stretched Angelo, neatly slain, on the mat of green, before he had a chance. Even now the sight of the man was distressing to an honourable

duellist. Angelo was scored with blood-marks. Feeling that he dared not offer another chance to a fellow so desperately close-dealing, Weisspriess thrust fiercely, but delayed his fatal stroke. Angelo stooped and pulled up a handful of grass and soft earth in his left hand.

'We have been longer about it than I expected,' said Weisspriess.

Angelo tightened his fingers about the stringy grass-tuft; he stood like a dreamer, leaning over to the sword; suddenly he sprang on it, received the point right in his side, sprang on it again, and seized it in his hand, and tossed it up, and threw it square out in time to burst within guard and strike his stilet below the Austrian's collar-bone. The blade took a glut of blood, as when the wolf tears quick at dripping flesh. It was at a moment when Weisspriess was courteously bantering him with the question whether he was ready, meaning that the affirmative should open the gates of death to him.

The stilet struck thrice. Weisspriess tottered, and hung his jaw like a man at a spectre: amazement was on his features.

'Remember Broncini and young Branciani!'

Angelo spoke no other words throughout the combat.

Weisspriess threw himself forward on a feeble lunge of his sword, and let the point sink in the ground, as a palsied cripple supports his frame, swayed, and called to Angelo to come on, and try another stroke, another—one more! He fell in a lump: his look of amazement was surmounted by a strong frown.

His enemy was hanging above him panting out of wide nostrils, like a hunter's horse above the long-tongued quarry, when Vittoria came to them.

She reached her strength to the wounded man to turn his face to heaven.

He moaned, 'Finish me'; and, as he lay with his back to earth, 'Good-evening to the old army!'

A vision of leaping tumbrils, and long marching columns about to deploy, passed before his eyelids: he thought he had fallen on the battle-field, and heard a drum beat furiously in the back of his head; and on streamed the cavalry, wonderfully caught away to such a distance that the figures were all diminutive, and the regimental colours swam in smoke, and the enemy danced a plume here and there out of the sea, while his mother and a forgotten Viennese girl gazed at him with exactly the same unfamiliar countenance, and refused to hear that they were unintelligible in the roaring of guns and floods and hurrahs, and the thumping of the tremendous big drum behind his head—'somewhere in the middle of the earth': he tried to explain the locality of that terrible drumming noise to them, and Vittoria conceived him to be delirious; but he knew that he was sensible; he knew her and Angelo and the mountain-pass, and that he had a cigar-case in his pocket worked in embroidery of crimson, blue, and gold, by the hands of Countess Anna. He said distinctly that he desired the cigar-case to be delivered to Countess Anna at the Castle of Sonnenberg, and rejoiced on being assured that his wish was comprehended and should be fulfilled; but the marvel was, that his mother should still refuse to give him wine, and suppose him to be a boy: and when he was so thirsty and dry-lipped that though Mina was bending over him, just fresh from Mariazell, he had not the heart to kiss her or lift an arm to her!—His horse was off with him—whither? —He was going down with a company of infantry in the Gulf of Venice: cards were in his hands, visible, though he could not feel them, and as the vessel settled for the

black plunge, the cards flushed all honours, and his mother shook her head at him : he sank, and heard Mina sighing all the length of the water to the bottom, which grated and gave him two horrid shocks of pain : and he cried for a doctor, and admitted that his horse had managed to throw him ; but wine was the cure, brandy was the cure, or water, water !

Water was sprinkled on his forehead and put to his lips.

He thanked Vittoria by name, and imagined himself that General, serving under old Würmser, of whom the tale is told that being shot and lying grievously wounded on the harsh Rivoli ground, he obtained the help of a French officer in as bad case as himself, to moisten his black tongue and write a short testamentary document with his blood, and for a way of returning thanks to the Frenchman, he put down among others, the name of his friendly enemy's widow ; whereupon both resigned their hearts to death ; but the Austrian survived to find the sad widow and espouse her.

His mutterings were full of gratitude, showing a vividly transient impression to what was about him, that vanished in a narrow-headed flight through clouds into lands of memory. It pained him, he said, that he could not offer her marriage ; but he requested that when his chin was shaved his moustache should be brushed up out of the way of the clippers, for he and all his family were conspicuous for the immense amount of life which they had in them, and his father had lain six-and-thirty hours bleeding on the field of Wagram, and had yet survived to beget a race as hearty as himself :—' Old Austria ! thou grand old Austria ! '

The smile was proud, though faint, which accompanied the apostrophe, addressed either to his country or to his father's personification of it ; it was inexpressibly

pathetic to Vittoria, who understood his 'Oesterreich,' and saw the weak and helpless bleeding man, with his eyeballs working under the lids, and the palms of his hands stretched out open—weak as a corpse, but conquering death.

The arrival of Jacopo and Johann furnished help to carry him onward to the nearest place of shelter. Angelo would not quit her side until he had given money and directions to both the trembling fellows, together with his name, that they might declare the author of the deed at once if questioned. He then bowed to Vittoria slightly and fled. They did not speak.

The last sunbeams burned full crimson on the heights of the Adige mountains as Vittoria followed the two pale men who bore the wounded officer between them at a slow pace for the nearest village in the descent of the pass.

Angelo watched them out of sight. The far-off red rocks spun round his eyeballs ; the meadow was a whirling thread of green ; the brown earth heaved up to him. He felt that he was diving, and had the thought that there was but water enough to moisten his red hands when his senses left him.

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